A Past of Plank and Nail

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A Past of Plank and Nail

by gleamingandwholeanddeadly (something_safe), printersdeadly, printersdevils (tuesdaysgone)

Summary

Hannibal needs a kitchen remodel, and his colleague and friend Alana knows just the guy to help him with his rundown new home. Enter Will Graham, carpenter and contractor extraordinaire, and devastating addition to Hannibal's daily life. When he starts running out of new projects to keep Will around, Hannibal fast realizes his infatuation is more than simple attraction - and that getting Will to agree to dinner is only the first hurdle.

Convinced that police work PTSD and an empathy disorder mean he's better off alone, Will doesn't let many people get close. Balancing his inconsistent mental health with his burgeoning affections for Hannibal seems an almost impossible task, but somewhere along the line he realizes that asking for help- much like falling in love- is easy with the right people.

Notes

Deadly's Notes:

So I think it's important to state from the off here that Will's gender identity is completely incidental to his storyline, and that this fic is about the importance of being supported and accepting help when struggling with mental health problems over anything else. @printersdevils and I both believe that queer representation in all media, even fan produced media, is super important and our depiction of Will is a part of that. It's a story about how pivotal times in our lives can shape and harm us, and it's about love. I knew from the off that this story was going to be important to us- that this Will was going to be important- and it's a deeply personal project that helped me work out a lot of my own feelings in what I hope is a sensitive and informed way. Please don't hesitate to communicate with us about it. - Deadly xoxo

L's Notes:

Basically, what Deadly said. Please send us a message about the contents of this story if you would like to for any reason. (It can also be about what a terrible choice marble is for kitchen counters, I have way too many feelings about that.) Hope you enjoy - L xoxo

Chapter 1

"Hannibal," Alana sighs, taking a long sip of the lager he hands her and leaning against his kitchen counter, "I have to say, I really don't see what the emergency is here."

Hannibal picks at the edge of the chipped counter, peeling away a fleck of overlay to reveal hardboard beneath. "Are you sure?"

"It's functional. The appliances are less than five years old. It may not be pretty -"

"The ugliness of it is not up for debate."

"- okay, I wasn't intending to, but it has potential. Right?"

She still looks amused. Hannibal is decidedly not. He looks around again. He hasn't had a chance to visit before moving day - which he knew was a bad idea, but he'd seen photos, and the realtor had assured him - well, it doesn't matter. He'd needed somewhere in a hurry. He's here now. And it's unacceptable, no matter what Alana thinks.

"Well, you gutted the last place," she shrugs, voice mild, "figured you'd do the same thing here. You like your kitchens specific. And, I've got someone who can do specific. He's very good. Only does bespoke. Very expensive." She raises her eyebrows like that might sweeten the pot.

"Congratulations on burying the lede, Ms. Bloom."

"My forte." She mimes a little bow. "You want his number? I can give you a card. I should warn you though, he's occasionally..." she thinks for a moment, then gives up. "I'm trying to think of a polite way of saying 'unintentionally rude'."

"Are you sure it's unintentional?"

"Quite sure. He's a friend of mine." She seems unconcerned that Hannibal has moved onto peering at the tiles around the sink. Something needs doing, whatever the weather.

"Well, I appreciate the warning."

"You'll appreciate him, too. He's called Will." She gets a card out of her purse.

Hannibal thanks her and removes the prepared charcuterie platter from his refrigerator. Cooking here is still too depressing to face. She helps him dig crockery out from the boxes littered in the hallway.

"I wouldn't have expected you to be someone who'd move so quickly," she comments.

He regards her curiously as he sets up the breakfast bar for their meal - the table doesn't look to be up to much. "I had put an offer in somewhere else, but the deal fell through after I'd

already agreed on a leaving date with my buyers. Hence buying this charming place in rather a hurry."

"It is a beautiful property," she says, peering out the French doors at the overgrown garden.

"It will be." Hannibal looks too, topping up his wine and offering Alana more beer before they sit down to eat.

When she's left for the evening, he walks from room to room, studying his new home. The mess bothers him, but unpacking will help. He wants cleaners and decorators in - just bases for now, a blank canvas. Some of his furniture came with him, other pieces were clearly not appropriate. He's having a good portion of them auctioned off, and it's a good job considering the amount of work he's going to have to put into the place.

"You're always saying you want more excuses to be at home," Alana had said.

Hannibal digs the card out of his pocket again with her carpenter friend's details: the kitchen needs sorting first. There's a website on the card, which on perusal is somewhat neglected, but the photo samples of previous work provided are of an excellent standard.

Satisfied, Hannibal checks a clock. It's not too late for a business phone call, so he finds his phone and dials. It rings for a long time, and the answer comes with a few flurried noises of movement and muttering.

"Hello?"

"Yes, is this Mr. Graham?"

"Last time I checked, can I help you?"

Hannibal represses a sigh. "I hope I haven't called at a bad time. My name is Hannibal Lecter, and Alana Bloom recommended you for a kitchen remodel in my new home."

"You haven't, I just got in from walking the dogs, sorry." There's some more rustling. "Okay. Kitchen remodel. Sure, what kind of thing are you thinking? Do you have ideas or - I can bring some photos when I come to give you a quote?"

"I have some ideas, but I'd be happy to see your portfolio. I will be honest, this is a full gut job, Mr. Graham. Would your schedule allow that?"

"It would at the minute, you've caught me on an opening." Will hums. "When would be convenient for an appointment?"

"Tomorrow? Any time late afternoon, I have only early classes on Fridays."

"All right. Three sound okay?"

"Yes, perfect." Hannibal gives him the address.

"Got it. I'll bring my folder. Good night Mister - Lecter."

"Doctor," Hannibal says. "Enjoy your evening."

"Doctor," Will corrects. "Good night."

Satisfied, Hannibal hangs up and goes into his terrible kitchen for another glass of wine. Not overly friendly, Alana's Will Graham. Gruff and cool, though Hannibal had been expecting it after Alana's warning. Hannibal can respect that, as long as the man is professional.

He finishes up; gets ready out of his suitcase and wash bag and then eases into bed with a sigh. Tomorrow he must begin unpacking. This state can only last for so long.

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Will Graham arrives promptly at five to three and knocks on Hannibal's door. Hannibal, of course, is already waiting, and he goes to the front door and opens it with a welcoming expression. Will Graham is unexpected. Dark curls, a short, well maintained beard and bright, pale blue eyes that he points anywhere but at Hannibal. He's not well dressed but not entirely unfortunate, holding a bulging folder under a khaki-clad arm. He's altogether more clean-cut than Hannibal's idea of a contractor; he has a particular handsomeness that makes him look rather delicate considering the work in question.

"Mister Graham, please come in."

"Thank you." He looks a bit confused when Hannibal holds his hand out. "Uh-?"

"Your coat, I'll hang it for you."

"It's fine, I won't be long. Uh - thanks though." He stalls a bit. "Do you want me to take my shoes off?"

"It would be little use, the house is in a state," Hannibal sighs.

Will nods, shifting from foot to foot as he looks around. "It's a state, sure, but it's a nice piece of property. Lots of - what would a real estate agent say? - 'personality'." His lip curls around it, but the hostility seems more generally aimed at real estate than Hannibal. They go through to the kitchen, and he looks around flatly. "You weren't kidding about the overhaul."

"Alana assures me it is functional. I can't see past the -" Words fail him, so he just gestures.

"Yeah, no, it's uh." Will nods, words apparently failing him too. "So, yes, you said full gut and now I definitely agree." He sets his binder down on the counter and starts opening cabinets and drawers. He looks displeased with his findings.

Finding no reason not to, Hannibal starts to flip through the portfolio after a simple "may I?" yields a nod. This work, newer he suspects, is of an even higher standard. "You do furniture as well?"

"I do all sorts." He flicks a look up at Hannibal, then goes back to inspecting the plumbing.

"This is exceptional work, Mister Graham," Hannibal comments mildly.

"Thank you. Do you have a certain style in mind?"

"It's to be largely functional. I am generally appreciative of aesthetic beauty, but I think a kitchen requires practicality above everything else. Easy to clean, tasteful. Modern but without compromising personality. I'll want high-end appliances, of course." He names a few brands, the variety of pieces he requires, and watches understanding dawn on his face.

"Oh, you want a *kitchen*," he murmurs, apparently amused. "All right. It will take a long time though. Functional in a few weeks, but if you want it..." he makes a fussy gesture with his hand. "Then y'know. Could be longer."

"I prefer exceptional to functional," Hannibal says, unconcerned.

"Have you lived through a kitchen remodel before?" Will asks, still sounding dryly amused.

"I'm sure I can adapt."

"So that's a no. I will be honest, it can be a frustrating process, but I'll be transparent about it."

"Transparency would be much appreciated."

Will nods, looking around again. "I'm going to have to rip everything out. Not much to salvage but I'll do what I can." He looks down at the floor. "Tiles are okay, but a couple need replacing. Do you have any specific fixtures or fittings you'd like?"

"Some, yes," Hannibal murmurs. "I can give you the details."

"Okay. Let's talk details." He pulls a pad out of his bag. Hannibal answers his set of rapid fire questions just as rapidly. Will sketches on squared paper while they talk, leaning on the pockmarked counter and making a floor plan. He seems to think the entire kitchen should be laid out differently, and he's trying to convince Hannibal, who is still mentally cooking in his old kitchen.

"… You'll get more out of the space with an island," Will is saying, confidently.

"I'm just concerned about the flow between my prep spaces. Also, I have a vintage piece I'd like to incorporate."

"What's the piece?" Will looks interested now.

"I'll show you." Hannibal leads him out to the garage. Will studies it with an expression of faint consternation.

"Is... is that an operating table?"

"Antique," Hannibal murmurs. "I am trained as a surgeon."

"That sounds... hygienic."

"I assure you this table was cleaned on a daily basis better than any restaurant worktop," Hannibal says, a bit irritated.

"I'm sure that's true." Will looks at the surface of it closely. "It's beautiful. Where did you find it?"

"At the foreclosure sale of a private hospital."

"All right. I'll work it into the space." He takes a tape measure out and gives it a quick size up. "We'll need to look at finishes again, but I can work up a quote based on this information." As he says it, his eyes point somewhere around Hannibal's mouth. He waves the plans. "It's not going to be cheap. I hope that's okay."

"I prefer exceptional to inexpensive as well," Hannibal tells him.

"Well, it'll be mine. It'll be clean and neat and stand up to a lot, and it'll look good. If that's exceptional by your standards, we'll get on well."

"Your portfolio is indeed exceptional," Hannibal murmurs, following Will back into the kitchen.

"Good." Will gives him a small, brittle smile, more like he's not used to it than anything. He hovers a bit. "So - how do you know Alana? She texted me to let me know she'd referred me."

"We are colleagues - in fact, I was her advisor at Johns Hopkins as well."

"Oh, I see." Will nods. He smiles, apparently at the thought of Alana. "So, you're a psychiatrist. You still teach?"

"I teach more than I give therapy, currently. It's a desirable shift. Spending days at a time immersed in others' minds can make it difficult to clear your own."

He's sure he doesn't imagine the sharpness of Will's expression at that. "I imagine that's true," Will mutters.

"Well," Hannibal continues smoothly, "I look forward to hearing from you."

Will nods. "Sure. I'll call you. Thanks for your time, Doctor Lecter."

"Thank you for yours." Hannibal walks him to the door and they shake hands. He watches Will walk back to a battered but well-maintained truck before he closes the door. He considers the emptiness of the house again, and inhales the lingering scent of wax and sawdust. He likes the looks of this one. Even likes his prickly attitude. He's curious about how he knows Alana. He'll have to be sure to ask.

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He hears back from Will within a week and finds both his designs and his quote acceptable. The following Monday, Will arrives at his house with a sledgehammer. He seems surprised

when Hannibal follows him into the kitchen, but nods approvingly when he gets there. "You had the appliances hauled away."

"Donated them," Hannibal murmurs. "They even came to pick them up."

"Good of them." Will surveys the rest of the space, shrugging off his overshirt and tying it around his waist. "So you're happy for everything to go."

"Entirely, yes. I trust your judgment."

"All right. I brought a dumpster on the truck, so I'll leave that outside the garage for debris. I'll make sure it's out of your way."

"I understand there will be mess, Will. Please let me know if you need anything."

"Thank you, Doctor Lecter." He opens up his kit and unpacks a drill and a tool belt, securing the latter around his waist. Then he looks up again. "Do you - work from home? This will not be precisely quiet."

"I am used to hectic workspaces, I'm sure I'll be fine." Hannibal gives him a smile. "Though I do spend several days a week at the university. To that end, here is a key for you," he adds, reaching into his pocket.

Will accepts it with a nod. "I guess this means it's serious," he jokes idly, holding the key up in illustration.

Hannibal's lips twitch. "My friends would tell you there's nothing I take more seriously than my kitchen."

"I've heard that." Will doesn't suppress his own smile. "I promise to treat her gently."

"Says the man with the sledgehammer."

"Omelets, eggs." Will puts his drill bit in and opens the cupboard on the counter, starting to undo the hinges.

Sensing he’s been dismissed, Hannibal leaves Will to his devices. When he returns some hours later to finally satisfy his curiosity on his progress, the room is almost entirely empty.

"It looks better already," Hannibal comments, leaning on the jamb.

Will looks over his shoulder, and grins a grin that shows his white, neat teeth. He's sweat-misted, hair even more wild than when he started. Hannibal looks at the veins standing out in his arms and runs his tongue against the back of his teeth. He hasn't been ignoring how attractive his contractor is, not in the slightest. But he hasn't made a point of noticing either. Now, he can't quite help himself.

"I won't do much more today, hopefully get the tiles off the walls. Did you think about the floor? Want me to see if I can replace the cracked ones?"

"No," Hannibal shakes his head. "Now that I see it like this, I think I'd rather have a clean slate."

"All right. Might need levelling before I can lay new ones."

"Very well. Can I offer you some coffee? I've set up a few essentials in the dining room for the time being."

"Oh - sure, I could go for coffee. Thank you." Will straightens up and rolls his shoulders, tipping his neck as if to relieve an ache. It looks practiced, practically unconscious. Hannibal observes, but doesn't ask. Perhaps he has some sort of past injury.

"I'll bring it to you." He does, mindful of stepping on loose wood chipping and disrupted plaster. Will takes a sip and sighs. "That's - really good."

"Thank you." Hannibal sips his own. "You're free to use the French press anytime, should you like some."

Will gives him another crooked, straight little smile. "All right. This seems like it should be the time to mention I often drink instant. But I do know how to use a French press."

Hannibal closes his eyes like the news wounds him. "You may have to bring your own, if that's what you prefer."

Will laughs. "I didn't say prefer. My tastes are wide enough to encompass multiple options."

"Hopefully they develop over time," Hannibal muses.

Will eyes him. "I can tell which way you're suggesting they go."

"I happen to think that developing taste is as worthy a pursuit as any form of self improvement."

"Do you?" Will muses. "I suppose I do have to admire yours."

Hannibal allows a smile, chin raising. "In coffee?"

"And kitchens." Will shrugs, taking another sip.

"I don't think I can willingly take credit for my taste in the kitchen you'll be making."

"Oh no, I'll be taking plenty of credit for it."

"As you should." His non-threatening acidity is unwittingly charming. It's possible it's deliberate, but Hannibal isn't sure. Will looks down at his coffee and Hannibal tilts his head. "How is it you came to know Alana, if I may ask? I've never heard her mention you and I've known her some time."

"If you must know, we dated for a while. A short while, but we're still friends."

Hannibal pauses, surprised. "Then she must consider you quite singular. She's a selective woman."

"I'm aware," Will says dryly. "Maybe that's why it's in the past tense." Hannibal presses his lips together, fearing he's misspoken. "Don't worry," Will says, "it was mutual. More or less. She's a good friend, I'm glad it turned out this way."

"All things considered, I admit I'm rather disappointed we haven't met until now," Hannibal replies. That must bring Will up short, because it takes him a second to garner an answer.

"Well, you're a doctor, and a socialite, and I... spend most of my time in my shed."

Hannibal inclines his head. "Not today, however."

"No, you lured me out with work and coffee."

"I'll make a note of it."

Will still looks puzzled, though not displeased. "You do that, Doctor. Anyway," he drains his cup and stretches a bit. "I'll finish up and then get going."

"Very well, Will."

"I'll give you a heads up before I go." He smiles. "Thanks for the coffee."

And then he goes back to work. Hannibal looks at the cup left behind and wonders what's come over him. He's fairly sure he ought not to flirt with his contractor, even if he really is flirting with Alana's friend. A friend Alana has dated. He's not sure it isn't terribly rude. He's loath to bring it up, though not of course for fear of embarrassment, precisely. Instead, he listens to Will; watches him hefting the last of the debris to the dumpster outside, and then comes to bid him farewell when he's donned his shirt and jacket once more.

"I'll bring tile samples with me tomorrow," Will says.

"Very well. Thank you." Hannibal smiles.

Will smiles back, crooked this time, and climbs in his truck and waves as he backs out of the driveway.

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After the dogs are fed, Will eats pasta and drinks whiskey on the porch before he goes to take a long, hot shower to get the stink of sweat and plaster dust off himself. It makes him feel fresher, but he's still pleasantly tired. He stands under the water for a long time, and when he's done he walks the dogs, throwing sticks and shooing them off various dead things they find in the woods. He thinks unbidden of Hannibal Lecter's antique operating table and smiles.

What a strange man, honestly. Will hasn't been able to keep from being aware of his presence all day - from his wandering footsteps in the house upstairs, and his unnatural stillness in the

doorway of the kitchen, his gaze burning the back of Will's neck as he worked. Usually staring makes him uncomfortable. It feels too much like being examined - like being stamped 'pass' or 'fail'. Doctor Lecter's stare feels more like that of a historian regarding a piece of unfamiliar art. Still appraising, but appreciative.

Winston trots up to him, tail wagging, and Will strokes the velvet of his muzzle gently. He starts to walk back to the house, pied piper to the river of dogs behind him. He spends an hour or so going over his remodel plans and installation schedule, making a note to load tile samples into his truck from his barn, before he's ready to sleep.

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The next morning when he arrives at Hannibal's house, he's brewing coffee, one cup of which he hands to Will as soon as he's in the door. Will can't help smiling. "Subtle, Doctor. Was it the comment about instant?"

"I'd be lying if I said I didn't find the thought distressing." He smiles. He looks, as ever, as neat as a new pin. Slim and long and almost unnervingly well put together. He makes Will feel hurricane-struck by comparison.

"Well, I'd be lying if I said I hadn't thought about your coffee, so it looks like you're winning." He punctuates it with a sip. "Do you work today?"

"I do, yes. You just caught me."

"Can I detain you to look at tile samples, or will you be back later?"

"I have time," the Doctor says politely.

"Good." Will goes back to his truck and brings in the samples, which he lays out on the floor in a row. Hannibal regards each one. Will points out a couple he thinks would work well. "The green would be striking, though it can be a little dark - though in a kitchen this size it won't matter."

"What about the charcoal?" Hannibal nudges one with his toe. "Is it too close to the cabinet color?"

"I mean, there's going to be a lot of brushed steel with your appliances. You don't like the marble?"

"I do," Hannibal paces, looking thoughtful. Will watches him, knelt in front of the tile.

"I think a pale floor would open up the space a bit more."

Hannibal nods, once. "Yes, this cream marble is nice."

Will watches him; the angles of his face. He looks down at the tile samples again, and touches his finger to slate that's flooded with crimson grain. "This would work too."

"Maybe a deep red accent on the backsplash to match," Hannibal nods.

"Yeah, that would work." Will can imagine it now, like a blood stain on the floor and walls amidst flawless, cool greys. It's surprisingly moving. He looks up again, and Hannibal is watching him with his head tilted. He nods, decided.

"Order it."

"All right. Sorry to keep you from work."

"Not at all. It's a pleasure to see things coming together."

"It'll look great. As soon as your white goods come in, you'll be able to start using it again. And when the sink is installed - which, I actually uh - I had an idea about. If you have time."

Hannibal nods, immediately attentive. Will gets out his phone and shows him a couple of hastily downloaded photos of surgery sinks.

"They're standard for most places, easy enough to get hold of but I think fitted with your choice of faucet, it'd look - it'd be appropriate."

Hannibal looks thoughtful. "Could you find an antique porcelain one, do you think?"

"I could do that, yeah." He makes a note in his file and looks back up at Hannibal. They exchange another smile. "See you later, maybe," Will says, wrapping his tool belt around his waist.

"I'm sure we will. Call me if you need anything, Will."

Will concentrates on stacking the tile samples until he hears the Bentley pull away. Then, he gets to work.

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The next couple of weeks are the same, save for weekends, and by the time Will has plastered the walls and the first of the appliances is starting to arrive, it's looking a hell of a lot different than when he started. He has the base cabinets installed, with plywood laid over the top until his marble tops are delivered, so soon Hannibal will actually be able to cook. From what Alana says, it must be driving him crazy to use the galley-style setup in the other room.

Today when Will arrives, he's got good news, and Hannibal - as ever - has good coffee.

"Your sink has been dispatched."

Hannibal smiles. "I still can't believe you found a piece in that condition. You're a miracle worker."

"I've always had luck finding strange things," Will agrees mildly, blowing the steam off the surface of his coffee. He sees Hannibal's lips twitch, but he doesn't rise to the bait. Shame. He's fun when he does. He's more than capable at keeping up with Will's barbs, even seeming to enjoy them.

"I also have an affinity for the unusual," he supplies, eventually.

"Do you?" Will keeps his voice light. He can only see it at certain moments; the operating table. The Byzantine coffeemaker Will had found one day while looking for Hannibal's bean grinder.

"I've been told."

"Well, you can enjoy the unusual in about a week once the sink arrives." Hannibal opens his mouth, and then closes it again. Will tilts his head. "Yes? No?"

"Yes, good," Hannibal manages.

Oh, fascinating. He watches Hannibal fuss with a fancy steel thermos for his coffee and pick up his bag. "Have a good day at work."

"Thank you - I'll be home early today, so perhaps I'll see you later."

All he's planning to do today is install the under-cabinet lighting, but he hums agreement anyway. He can always find something to do.

Around midday, he hears a car door close outside and goes to the garage door to peer outside. It's not Hannibal - Will isn't sure he's not disappointed - but Alana, her dark curls bouncing in the wind as she walks toward the house. He steps outside to greet her. "Hey, stalker."

"Hey." She holds up a deli bag. "I brought lunch."

"My favorite place, what did I do?"

"I just like you. Also, I brought something for Hannibal too, in case he was here."

"No, just me, I'm afraid. Come on through, though, I can show you the kitchen."

He studies her as he follows her inside. She's dressed down a bit today, which is just as well. Hannibal has been rather accepting of the level of dust Will's still generating - and he’s in turn kept a clean yard - but there's still some. It also suggests she's not here to flirt with Hannibal, or indeed him, which is a shame. He remembers the dress she wore when they first agreed to go for a drink. He remembers being surprised she was into - well, the mess of twisted nerves that he was back then.

"Wow, you've made great headway," she says, voice echoing off the cavernous kitchen walls.

"Thanks," Will says. "I'm expecting the marble tops this week; unfortunately, there was a delay with the slabs. It's just the finishes after that. And whatever these custom pieces are that Hannibal keeps mentioning."

Alana nods, looking around. "What sort of custom pieces?"

"I have no idea, honestly. He was just really happy how the operating table and the antique sink came out, I guess." Will shrugs, watching Alana inspect things.

"Antique sink. I should have known." She smiles, laying their respective deli boxes on the counter and producing plastic cutlery, too. Will thinks it's a good job Hannibal's not here, on second thought - on the rare occasion Will shows up with a takeout cup, he's noticed Hannibal's subtle disdain.

"So," Alana continues, "how've you been?"

Will shrugs. "I've been well. I know I have you to thank for this very lucrative job, so. Thanks."

"Well, I thought you'd be the man for the job. And I thought it'd do you good to get out of the house."

"Maybe. Hannibal's not as bad as my usual clients."

Her eyebrow raises. "High praise. How not as bad are we talking?"

"He's entertaining to talk to," Will shrugs. "And attractive." Alana gives him a little, salacious eyebrow raise that makes Will laugh. "Don't look at me like that."

"I'll look at you however I want. If I'd had any idea that was your type..."

"He's not my *type*," Will stutters, "I don't have a type." He scowls and helps himself to a sandwich. "You were my type too."

"Hannibal and I have a lot in common."

"That's true. Seems he's more your type than mine."

Alana laughs and takes a bite of salad. "Will, I've known you for years, I can tell when you're trying to get information out of me."

He shrugs. "So give me what I want, probably less embarrassing for both of us."

"Oh my god." She looks delighted. "Do you want to go out with him?"

"I - I just - want to know if I should take his staring at me as 'just a thing he does', or if I should stare back. Does he even like - men?"

She looks at him like she knows what that question almost was. "Hannibal is one of the most open-minded people I know." Then she smirks. "So, he stares?"

"Unless I'm grossly misreading things," Will shrugs. He eats some of his sandwich and pretends it's more interesting than Alana's considering expression. It is really good, but he can't ignore the tightness in his belly.

"You don't often misread," she says mildly.

He knows that. He sighs, rubbing his eyes. "I guess I'm. Intentionally misreading."

"You haven't dated in a long time," Alana says, voice shading soft.

"I didn't date much even before," Will shrugs. Then he levels a finger at her. "Don't start psychoanalyzing me; we were doing so well today."

She holds her hands up. "I'm just saying that you are the only person holding yourself back from an opportunity." She smiles guilelessly at him, and he sighs.

"I've not been entirely without contact," he mutters, "it just hasn't been... frequent. Or repeated." He takes another bite and chews. At her nod, he rolls his shoulders. "I should at least wait to hit on him until I'm done with his renovation, so I can never see him again if necessary."

"Maybe you should just try to have a conversation with him. Get to know him. Hannibal is fascinating, and generous with himself in a lot of ways."

"Oh, good. Small talk."

"Make it big talk if that's what you want. He's good at that too." She chews for a moment and watches him. "You never seemed to mind making small talk with me."

"I never have."

"Made small talk, or minded?"

"Never minded, Alana." Will reaches out to squeeze her wrist briefly. She smiles at him.

"You're better company than you think, Will. I think that if you see something you like in Hannibal, you should... let yourself enjoy it." He bites his lip and she raises a teasing brow. "Doctor's orders."

"I know where I can find a second opinion," he mutters. "He's a psychiatrist - I don't know if that's such a good idea. Look how you and I turned out."

"You were in a different place then," she reminds him.

"I'm still me. I just feel like me now that I'm off the force."

"I know, but I think feeling like you has made you a lot more comfortable being you." She puts her chin in her hand and gives him a sweet smile. "And you look great, just so you know."

"Stop, you'll make me blush," he deadpans. And then he feels bad. "Thanks, though." The discussion of his appearance automatically makes him self-conscious, shifting in his seat and touching his chest. Alana's expression turns apologetic. He waves a hand to dismiss it. "Don't, I'm just being oversensitive."

"You're allowed. However, you don't need to be." She looks like she's blushing a little.

Will laughs and pats her arm gently. "Let's shake it off."

"Yes, let's." She grins. "I should let you finish eating so your employer doesn't think you've slacked on your work today."

"My employer watched me dismantle and rebuild an entire kitchen with my own two hands over the last few weeks, I don't think he'll be accusing me of slacking anytime soon."

"Did he actually watch?" she says, sounding delighted.

"He spent quite a bit of time watching." Will laughs.

"I could see him being fascinated by the demo, but also by the view."

Will smiles. "Tell me about him."

"Wouldn't you rather find out on your own? I know you want to."

"I don't mean his life story just - Jesus, humor me."

Alana relents. "He's incredibly intelligent; he's a doctor, a teacher, an artist, a musician, a chef... he thinks anything worth doing is worth doing -"

"Exquisitely?" Will interrupts with a smile.

"Exactly." She smiles too. "He likes interesting things. He likes things that do what he doesn't expect them to." Will lifts a brow, listening. Alana shrugs. "You must know you fall into that category."

"I'll defer to your wisdom."

"Sounds unlikely."

Will snorts. "Hey." He leans back against the kitchen wall. "This is such a weird conversation to be having here of all places."

"With me, you mean."

"If I felt able to have it with Hannibal, I wouldn't have the problem at all."

"Promise me you'll try."

He rolls his eyes, but with a faint smile. "I promise."

She smiles slyly. "Got time for cake?"

"If it's that raspberry torte this place does, yes."

"I remembered." She passes him a plastic fork and a confectionery carton. Will feels struck dumb by her sweetness. He missed her.

"It's good to see you, Alana."

"Just remember that the next time you decide to hide out in Wolf Trap for months on end."

"I wasn't hiding," he grumbles, even though he was. Alana's smile says everything it needs to. He huffs and eats his torte.

She helps him clean up after they finish, tucking a third sandwich in the small fridge in the dining room for Hannibal with a crooked smile and hugging him for a long time before she leaves. "Tell him I said hi." She gives him a grin, and then goes with a flick of her long hair. Will sighs and goes back to work.

*

He's worked up a considerable sweat by the time Hannibal gets back. Will hears him pause in the doorway, and he pauses in response, looking up to offer a smile. "Hi, Hannibal."

"Will," Hannibal replies. "You've had a visitor?"

"Alana has been, how did you know? She left you some cake."

"And her perfume. I have an unusually keen sense of smell." He smiles. "The kitchen is looking more complete, today."

Will nods. "The marble will come tomorrow. You'll be cooking real meals again by the weekend."

That makes him smile, a warming around his eyes rather than a movement in his mouth. "I'm sure it will have been worth the wait."

"I hope so." Will turns away before he blushes. "I finished installing your custom storage system in the pantry, so I decided to move some of the boxes out of the dining room to make unpacking easier on you. Did you know you have a lot of plaster damage on that one wall?"

"No, I wasn't aware," Hannibal says blithely.

Will turns a skeptical look on him. "Want me to do it while I'm here?"

"I could hardly impose."

"I don't mind at all."

Hannibal smiles. "I suppose to you it is a matter of little effort."

"It would only take an afternoon to sort it."

"Of course," Hannibal muses. "I did consider an accent wall in that room."

"What kind of accent are we talking?"

"That room is south-facing, it would be the perfect environment for herb propagation. I've seen such things in magazines, would it be difficult?"

Will stands, brushing his hands off. "Got some photos? Show me."

"Yes, of course, just a moment." Hannibal takes a step, then looks back. "Just in my study, if you would join me?"

"Sure, let me just wash my hands. Can I use the washroom?"

"What do you do when I'm not here to ask?" Hannibal replies, deadpan.

"I go home dirty." Will grins.

"Do you." Hannibal's inspection is subtle but not hidden.

Will bites his lip, shouldering into the bathroom and nudging the tap on with his wrist. "Comes with the territory."

"I imagine it does."

Will dries his hands carefully and follows Hannibal to the study. This room looks more complete than anywhere else he's seen in the house, though Will can see voids where furniture clearly hasn't made the move. The desk is gorgeous, dark wood with original carvings on the outer panels. Will touches the corner with an appreciative finger while Hannibal fishes out a tablet. He sees Will admiring it and murmurs, "Estate sale. French piece."

"It's gorgeous." Will glances over at Hannibal. "Alana tells me you're an artist, too."

"Does she?" Hannibal sounds pleased. He walks over and hands Will the tablet.

"I'd love to see your work if you have any to hand - sometime."

"I'm flattered you've taken an interest. Are you artistic, Will?"

"Only in the sense that I can design a kitchen, I'm afraid."

Hannibal indulges him with another not-smile. "Arguably a higher form of art altogether."

"I think we'll be forced to disagree." Will turns his attention back to the article Hannibal has pulled up for him. The planter design looks neat, he's a bit worried about drainage and damp. Nothing a bit of discreet plumbing wouldn't help.

"This is a bit more extensive than a simple replaster, Doctor, plus I really ought to do it in teak. I can work up a quote for you tonight."

"If it's an inconvenience, I can ask someone else."

"No, that's not what I meant at all. I have a sink refit booked after your kitchen, but that's only a day or two, and I would have to special order the teak anyway." He fidgets a bit and adds, "I'd make time for you anyway, you've. Been a good customer." Shit. He can practically

hear Alana sighing. "A good-" he tries again, can't put his hand on anything that isn't grossly overfamiliar and screws up his face. "It's been good to meet you."

Hannibal presses his lips together. Will tries very hard not to scowl.

"Likewise, Will. That's kind of you to say." He accepts the tablet back from Will's unresisting hand. "I feel quite fortunate, in fact."

"Fortunate? What do you mean?"

"I'm not sure if we'd have had such an opportunity if my original property hadn't fallen through. To that ends, I'm glad it did."

Will meets his eyes from under the somewhat protective fall of his fringe, trying to persuade his face from going too red. "Oh," he says, softly. "Thank you," he adds after a pause.

Hannibal watches him for a second longer, and then nods. Will bites his lip. He doesn't usually have a chance to study Hannibal's face when he's working, and it's fascinating to look at. Angular but curved, a sort of Roman-esque quality to it that. Will wonders what he looks like without his hair aggressively styled; his body made harsh and clean cut in suits. Even when he works at home, he's still wearing a collared shirt and tailored trousers. Even the coy tilt of his head seems overtly neat. He's probably been staring for too long now.

"Can I get you a drink, Will?" Hannibal asks, breaking the silence.

Will licks his lips. "Oh, I - sure, I just want to take a few measurements in the dining room?"

"Of course."

"Thanks, Hannibal," he adds softly. It feels a bit presumptuous to use his name but - it puts them on an even playing field, at least.

It softens his expression, too. He leads Will into the dining room and leaves him to measure up while he goes to retrieve whatever it is he's getting. Will doubts it's Coke Zero.

When he comes back into the room, he hands Will a glass with two fingers of amber liquid. Will sniffs tentatively. Scotch. Nice scotch, of course. *That* kind of drink. He smiles and holds his glass up to clink gently to Hannibal's own. "Cheers."

"To your health," Hannibal murmurs.

"To uh - new friends," Will offers, before he takes a sip. Fuck, it's good. He's about ready to throw down the gauntlet. He sighs happily at his second sip.

Hannibal smiles again. "You struck me as a whiskey drinker."

"Very astute. If I ask what I'm drinking, will my wallet just weep?"

Hannibal chuckles a bit. "It's expensive, but not criminally so."

"Of course not, you're not the criminal type," Will teases.

That makes him quirk another little grin, revealing pointed canines. "How foolish you'll feel if I turn out to be a serial killer."

"At least I know where you keep the knives." Will grins back. "In about two days, anyway."

"Adequate time to prepare an escape route."

"I'll start digging a tunnel from the basement." Will is still enjoying the little smile he'd produced. It makes him look altogether softer. Will bites his lip against the urge to disrupt his hair.

"I suppose it would serve me right," Hannibal replies. "Thank you for agreeing to the dining room, Will. I am fortunate you have time in your schedule."

"It's - it's honestly fine, I'm mostly just making furniture to order right now, outside of this. It's good to uh - flex a bit."

"By the looks of your portfolio, you've... flexed considerably. Any reason you've switched to furniture?"

"I had surgery and needed to be less active for a while," Will shrugs.

"Ah," Hannibal nods. "Naturally. Sledgehammers don't often find their way into physical therapy regimens."

Will grins helplessly. "No, not so much. That was a while back now - I just preferred the quiet, not as big of a job, and I have this old busted shoulder so... just took it easy for a while."

"Good," Hannibal murmurs. "It's good to know when to step back."

Will smiles. "Sounds like you're doing a little stepping back, too. That why you moved?"

"In part, yes. I enjoy filling my time, but I have many interests and only so much time. The distance from the city seems to help."

"Yeah, a little solitude goes a long way, even if it's only psychological. Mental decluttering."

"Spoken like someone who's been to therapy," Hannibal says mildly.

Will can't quite suppress his derisive snort. "How do you think I met Alana?"

"Never tell me you dated your therapist." Hannibal is excessively deadpan, but his eyes shine.

"Oh, she just did my evaluation and referral for work. Alana wouldn't uh - she's too professional for that. I found reasons to... run into her." Will smiles.

"I see." Hannibal pauses, and Will isn't sure if he looks - disappointed?

"She's - we're just friends now. We're not... compatible. I'm good with it like that." Will offers, not sure why he feels the need to clarify. Again.

"I see," Hannibal says again.

Will closes his eyes and mentally sighs. The man needs to have more than one expression. "What about you, no uh - no girlfriend?" Jesus, Will wants to cringe at himself.

"I'm single at the moment," Hannibal replies. He gives Will another little smile, possibly encouraging. Someone more socially adept than Will might be able to take that opening. Instead, he nods, looking down into his glass. This is all ridiculous. He doesn't do well at dating anyway. He told Alana that.

"Well," he says, after an awkward pause, "I should uh - probably finish up."

"If you must," Hannibal says politely. "I will see you tomorrow?"

"Yeah." Will nods. "Of course. I'll be here quite early to clear off the cabinets for the counter installers," he warns.

"I can serve us both breakfast, if you like?"

"Oh god, you don't have to do that, Hannibal."

"I'd like to. It's no trouble."

"You know you're paying me, right?" Will grins, half embarrassed.

"Of course. You don't say no to my coffee."

“Well, a cup of coffee is - look, I can see you're gonna argue with me on this, so I'll just say thank you, breakfast sounds great."

Hannibal definitely looks smug about that, but Will doesn't push. He finishes his whiskey and Hannibal holds a hand out for the tumbler.

"Thanks again, that will make the commute a little less...well. It's northern Virginia, so who knows."

Hannibal smiles. "I appreciate you making the trip every day."

"It's not as bad as it would be if you still lived in Baltimore," Will grins and shrugs a shoulder.

"Fortunate then that I moved."

Will makes a face. He's joking when he says that, right? Of course he is. Hannibal's eyes are winking that smile again. Will laughs a bit, and then gestures. "I'll, uh. Won't be long."

He packs up his tool bucket feeling like the tips of his ears are burning. Hannibal remains in the study, but Will imagines his attention still lingers; thinks he can feel it like a creeping cold breeze. He calls a goodnight down the hallway once he's loaded his truck. Hannibal appears as if summoned. He's rolled his sleeves up, and Will is unreasonably tantalized by the sight of his bare arms. He comes to the door, and Will can't stop watching him.

"Good night, Will."

"See you at six-thirty?" Will says.

"I shall look forward to it." He closes the door over gently. Will doesn't go until he sees his shadow retreat from the glass.

He's strangely content on his drive home. It feels good to have a normal thing to worry about - a familiar thing. It feels good to think of Hannibal's neat, well-manicured hands and his gaze, both as warm as the whiskey he'd given him. Will still can't believe he said yes to breakfast, but he's glad he did.

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When he's home and sorted the dogs and spent a while fucking around looking for a decent teak supplier in the area, he texts Alana.

>>He asked me to come for breakfast<<

<<Well, it's not asking you to stay for breakfast, but…>>

>>It's still a fairly intimate thing to ask your contractor. I don't usually get asked for breakfast.<< Occasionally given a sandwich, or a cookie with tea but - this isn't that.

<<When's the last time you made a friend, Will?>>

>>I have seven. Admittedly I'm not sure it counts as friendship if they make you pick up their feces.<<

<<You are a disturbed individual>>

>>That's not nice.<<

<<You're the one who brought dog poop into this.>>

>>You invalidated seven very important relationships in my life.<<

He can practically sense Alana's laughter. *<<I'd apologize if I thought you'd forgive me.>>*

Will smiles at his phone. *>>Just tell me I can be friendly if I try.<<*

<<You can be downright charming when you try.>>

Will shivers a little, imagining a charmed Hannibal. *>>Thanks.<<*

<<I believe in you. Don't wear cologne.>>

Will frowns at his phone. Then he remembers what Hannibal said earlier. A sensitive nose. Right.

He plugs his phone in to charge, stomach feeling light. Finally he walks the dogs and takes a shower. He's still thinking about Hannibal when he gets into bed. His fingertips itch like they can feel finely woven wool. He sighs at the thought; closes his eyes and turns over.

Chapter 2

Hannibal does not typically require a great deal of sleep, but he's not a morning person either. Today, however, it's easier than usual to get up, get showered and start breakfast as the dawn light is just touching the sky. His ears are tuned for the sound of a truck in his driveway. Eventually, he hears tires on gravel. He smiles and goes to fill a coffee cup.

When the door goes, he answers to find Will looking - somewhat less grubby than usual. He has a crisp button-down shirt over his usual Henley, today, and his hair isn't flying around like dandelion fluff. Not that Hannibal doesn't appreciate that look. He appreciates this one too, though. The shirt is snug on his well-formed arms and shoulders.

"Good morning, Will," Hannibal makes himself step back to let him in rather than just staring.

"Hi. Smells good in here. Did you sleep well?"

"I slept fine, and yourself?" Hannibal leads him through to the kitchen.

"Fine, thanks. I heard from the marble guys already, they think they'll be here by eight. I got them to put you first on the schedule."

"You're looking after me well. It's very much appreciated."

Will smiles down at his coffee. "It's not a problem." He looks a bit surprised when Hannibal pulls a chair out for him, but sits.

"It's just a simple egg casserole," Hannibal explains, "but I think you'll enjoy the herbed butter and the chorizo. I make my own."

"It smells incredible," Will says. Hannibal can feel him watching as he takes the dish out of the oven.

"How are you liking the new appliances?" Will asks.

"I am finding them completely satisfactory. I'm eagerly anticipating the arrival of my wine chiller."

"Of course." Will looks like he's suppressing a smile.

Hannibal gives him a fond look of reproach. "I have had to rely on my fridge for too long."

"I am the least knowledgeable about wine. Imagine the most ignorant person you know and subtract from that."

"I'm afraid I veer to the pretentious. Though I am not above beer and spirits with the right company, of course." He dishes casserole onto two plates and sets one in front of Will with a small flourish. "There are also croissants in the warming drawer, Will, if you'd like."

"Oh - sure, that sounds. Sounds good." He looks at his plate, expression clouding for a moment, guilt or uncertainty - Hannibal isn't sure. Hannibal can't figure out why he'd suddenly feel either. He retrieves the pastries, and sits down opposite Will.

"Bon appétit," he says, gesturing for him to start.

Will smiles briefly at him, blue eyes flashing up at him before he looks to his plate. Hannibal studies his face for another moment. He eats, and finally a smile. "This is really good."

"Thank you." Hannibal butters himself a croissant first, wiping his fingers delicately after. He watches Will eat, his expression sliding in and out of concern and content again. It perplexes Hannibal enough that he briefly wonders if he's said something to make him uncomfortable. Maybe just kindness makes him uncomfortable. He suspects Will has had a challenging life thus far. He hasn't suggested as much, but the way he seems to consider himself an uninvited guest in anyone's lives - Hannibal's and Alana's included - makes him think Will has been given reason to believe it. It makes him rather angry.

"So, Hannibal," Will interrupts his musing, "where are you from, if you don't mind my asking? Your accent is - I can't place it."

Hannibal inclines his head. "No surprise there. I was born in Lithuania, but I have also spent portions of my life in both France and Italy."

"Lithuania shares borders with Poland, right? You grew up there?"

"It does," Hannibal murmurs. "Both were occupied by Russia when I lived there. But I only lived there as a young boy, until my parents died and for a short time after."

Will looks up at that, eyes widening minutely. He considers, sipping his coffee, then sets the cup down. "I'm sorry to hear that, Hannibal."

"Thank you," Hannibal replies. "I was eventually adopted by my uncle, who was very generous."

"Eventually," Will murmurs. He sounds like he knows what that means. "My mother died when I was a kid. I don't talk to my dad."

Hannibal hums and takes a bite of eggs. "I see. Do you have any other family?"

"Not that I know of." Will gives him a grin. "Grandparents are gone, my dad was an only child - I think maybe an aunt on my mom's side somewhere, but I don't know. I'm not worried. I never felt like family was right for me, anyway."

Hannibal can barely refrain from making a therapist reply to that, but he does. "You're making it very easy for me to invite you for breakfast more often, Will," he warns gently.

He watches Will's forehead wrinkle like he wants to frown, but refrains. "I don't need a pity date, Doctor."

"Are you assuming it wouldn't be a regular date?"

Will glances up again. It's like seeing a glimpse of sun on clear water. "Seemed a safe assumption within context. Feel free to contradict me."

"Consider yourself contradicted."

Will turns spectacularly pink; keeps determinedly eating for a long moment. "I don't know how appropriate that would be," he mumbles.

Hannibal tilts his head. "Because I'm paying you to remodel my kitchen?"

"Yes?"

Hannibal shrugs. "I wouldn't consider it inappropriate. Money is no object to me, you needn't feel compunction over that. You're a craftsman."

Will sighs and eats more, and Hannibal watches him. He wonders if he's misread this. He really hopes he hasn't, and it's not just because Will does good work.

"You seemed perturbed at the idea of my dating my psychiatrist before, how is this different?"

"No one is psychoanalyzing anyone," Hannibal points out. "Just remodeling my house."

Will chews his lip. "I find myself arguing with you once again despite agreeing, Doctor."

"Do you simply enjoy arguing? I'm sure we could find a safe topic to debate."

"I'm sure we could. Arguing is always my first port of call."

"I'm shocked, truly."

"Sarcasm? The lowest form of wit, I've heard."

"That honor rather resides with crude humor in my book."

"It's a good job I've never been one for dirty jokes then, I guess." The look he flashes Hannibal suggests otherwise. Instead of annoyed, Hannibal feels - something else. Something warm.

"There's a difference between infantile jokes and clever double entendres, Mister Graham."

"It almost sounds like you're calling me clever."

"I have no doubt that you have a keen intellect. You'd have no cause for friendship with Alana if you didn't."

"That may not be what she liked best about me."

"Is this the setup for a clever double entendre?" Hannibal finds himself smiling.

"You can try."

"What did she like about you if not your intellect, Will?"

Will takes a sip of coffee. "Clever tongue."

Amusement and warmth pool low in Hannibal's belly; a slight hum of envy, too. He nods. "She always was quite the conversationalist."

Will snorts softly. Then he checks his watch. "You're awfully distracting, Doctor Lecter."

"I assure you, I don't expect you to work through your lunch."

"I just meant to prep for the marble." Will blushes.

Hannibal smiles. "Don't let me keep you if you have work to do."

"Can I help clean up?"

"You'll be doing quite enough for me today I suspect, Will. Finish your coffee." He stands and collects their plates. He watches Will as he cleans, as subtly as he can.

He's removing the plywood tops from the counters in readiness for true marble. He glances Hannibal's way and catches his eye. "Staying to supervise, Hannibal?"

"I was hoping to see the marble, but I can come back later."

"Let me shine it up for you first," Will says.

Hannibal nods in acquiescence. "Very well." He hates to leave, but he knows he's being a nuisance.

He makes himself scarce, spending the morning in the study. It's warm out, verging on hot, and he opens a window while he works. He's very happy with the large, wooded yard at this new house. It's usually quiet, and so he's surprised when he hears the growl of a sander out there. He knows the marble fitters are gone and it must be Will, but he goes to look anyway.

He's taking the grain off one of the cupboard doors he's building with the sander, the muscles in his shoulders bunching as he works. His shirt is tucked in his waistband. Hannibal stares at his back for longer than he intends. He's pale but trim, slim through the waist and nicely muscled. Hannibal does not feel at all bad about staring.

When the sander shuts off, Will straightens up and takes his shirt out of his waistband to wipe the dust and sweat off his face. Where his arms raise, Hannibal sees the pale flash of scar tissue. His head tilts, just an inch, and remembers what he said about taking a break from carpentry to recover from surgery.

He looks well-healed now, sturdy and athletic and entirely too tempting. Hannibal lets out a slight sigh. He'll get him to agree to a date sooner or later. He's not even entirely sure Will declined - just hovered over it, like he was waiting to be swayed. Hannibal is good at swaying.

He straightens up absently at his desk and heads to the kitchen. Out of the French doors, he can see Will more closely. He opens the fridge, peering at him from behind the door. His neck looks extra long and graceful like this. Hannibal pours two glasses of chilled, infused water and garnishes them with mint. When he closes the door, he finally looks at his marble countertops; forgets the drinks for a moment in favor of inspecting the veined stone.

Will had called him in earlier to see them, but had admonished him firmly not to touch them until the adhesive cured. Hannibal is rarely impatient, but being restricted to looking and not touching so often is driving him to distraction. With a sigh, he takes up the glasses and goes outside.

"Will," he calls out from the patio, "I have cold drinks, if you'd like."

Will looks up and nods, pulling his dirty shirt back on as he walks to the patio. "Thanks," he says softly. Hannibal holds his gaze as he hands it over. Will smiles when he takes a sip. "Fancy. Very good. Still mad at me for forbidding you touching the counters?" He smirks.

"Only slightly. They're exactly what I wanted - or they will be when I can touch them, at least."

"It won't be too long. Have you had marble before, I forget?"

Hannibal nods. "I have."

"So you know how to seal and reseal it."

"I believe I do, though if you think you have a particular method-?"

"I trust my marble in your capable hands, Doctor."

"I won't let that trust go to waste." Hannibal tilts his head. "I was under the impression that it was my marble."

Will shrugs. "Sentimentally at least, it's mine."

"Well, then I have important work to do." Hannibal lets himself look Will over. He's divine, completely, smelling of sweat and sun. He gives Hannibal a slight smile.

"I think I found a supplier for your teak," he says.

"I had every faith you would." He wonders how long Will will try to distract him with construction talk. He wonders if it's an excuse to keep talking, or an excuse not to talk about what they did this morning. Maybe it's both.

"Yeah, so I think it should be fairly simple to build - not quick, but I guess you don't mind that. I know a guy at a nursery to get you a decent deal on the plants as well - you'll need a lot, it might be a good idea just to have some for decoration, so it doesn't get too..." he gestures. "Strong."

Hannibal's lips curve. "How practical of you."

"Well, if it's in the dining room, don't want it to overpower your cooking."

"No, not at all."

Will wets his lips, eyes trained on the flags. "I think it'll look great - might be a little dark though."

"I'm considering replacing the lighting in there."

Will meets his gaze now. "Oh?"

"That chandelier is builder's grade at best."

"You probably want custom."

"You don't happen to know a lighting designer..."

Will laughs a bit. "You'll have to give me some time to work on that."

"I have time if you do."

Will drains his glass. Hannibal holds out a hand for it. "I can make time." Will smiles.

Hannibal takes the glass, holds it with his own in one broad hand. "Good. I'll let you go back to work."

"All right." Will nods. Hannibal washes up as he watches him go back to the yard. He wants to know what it would take to be allowed to touch.

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He spots his opportunity a few days later when, on returning home, he sees Will is favoring his shoulder. He stops working with the sander to wave as Hannibal comes to stand on the patio, having come in through the kitchen. Will's wince as he bends back down to work is clear.

"Will, wait," Hannibal calls out.

He does, running a hand over his sweaty brow. "All right?"

"I'm fine. You don't look so good."

"My shoulder is acting up, it's nothing."

"Could I look at it briefly? Please."

Will pauses, then he nods. "Okay. Forgot you were a doctor for a second."

"Luckily I have not." He takes a step closer, searching out knotted muscles and scar tissue through the cotton tee Will is wearing. "Can you take this off?"

"Think you'll be able to see through my skin?" Will says, tartly. Hannibal just gives him a look. Will sighs and strips off his shirt, turning his back to Hannibal to let him get a look at a long, clean scar over his shoulder blade.

"What happened?" Hannibal asks matter-of-factly.

"I got stabbed."

"I'm intrigued," Hannibal murmurs. Now that he can see the shape of the injury, he probes with his fingertips.

"I wouldn't recommend it."

Hannibal hums. Will's scent is curling up from his warm skin as Hannibal carefully kneads the stiff muscle. He shifts a bit where he's stood before Hannibal, sighing. "Ow."

"I will hazard a guess you didn't complete your physical therapy for this injury."

"I - sort of did. I mean. Okay I didn't, but I'm a carpenter."

Hannibal shakes his head. "Patients like you give doctors their grey hairs."

"I'd say I'm sorry but - y'know."

"Oh, I'm well aware you're not," Hannibal murmurs, watching the sliver of Will's cheek that he can see for winces. He sees a smile on the edge of the next.

"What's the prognosis, Doctor?"

"That very much depends on you."

"Go on."

"If you'd continue with proper physical therapy, you'd regain most of the range of motion fairly quickly. Regular massage might also help. With many things."

"Regular massage sounds pretty good," Will muses.

Hannibal represses a smile. It's not the question he wishes it was, after all. "How's it feel?" he asks.

"Much better, I think. Hurts now, of course."

Hannibal stops his hands, leaving them in place for now. "I'll get you some aspirin when I go inside."

Will pauses, then bites his lip. "You're done?" He thinks he sounds disappointed.

Hannibal does not wish to be done in the least. "If you need me to continue, you only need say."

Will hesitates, but shakes his head. "I'm taking too much of your time."

"I think that's for me to say." Will lets his head fall slightly forward as Hannibal continues. He massages carefully under his shoulder blade and in the join, listening to Will's little breaths and grunts of occasional discomfort.

"Honestly, Will, I could have been doing this for weeks now and you'd be much better off," Hannibal scolds softly.

"How're you fixed for twice a day for the rest of my life?" Will mumbles. It's meant to be a joke, he knows that. But it gives him a possessive jolt in his chest. He decides to take the opening.

"I could be persuaded."

"Is that so."

"Absolutely."

"I suppose that puts things squarely back on me."

"If lifelong massages seem a little daunting, I could suggest just dinner, first."

"You're very persistent," Will murmurs. Hannibal waits for him to continue, seeing as puzzling him out seems redundant. "Yes," Will finally says.

Hannibal rubs his thumb in a firm circle. "Yes what?"

"Yes, I'd like to have dinner with you."

"I'm very pleased to hear that. Shall we set a time before you leave today?"

"Sure," Will nods.

Hannibal is flushed with pleasure. When he peers at Will, he sees he's smiling too. "Perhaps I ought to let you get back to work," Hannibal murmurs.

"All right," Will nods. Hannibal stops his massage, reluctantly. Will rolls his shoulder; tugs his shirt back on, shooting Hannibal an amused look as he does. "Turning into a habit, isn't it, Doctor," he murmurs.

"What's that, Will?"

Will just raises an eyebrow. Hannibal raises his own, more innocently. It's all right if Will dances around it; he enjoys that too.

Finally, Will sighs. "You turning up when I don't have my shirt on."

Hannibal shrugs. "I'm not sorry." That seems to make him laugh, at least.

"I admire your honesty."

"I admire you." Hannibal pauses. "If I may."

Will bites the inside of his cheek, looking a bit like this whole concept is foreign to him. "You - you may." Then he smiles.

Hannibal smiles back, and then gestures. "I'll let you get on."

He goes, even though it's a struggle. He manages to leave him alone until he hears Will in the hall a couple of hours later.

"Hannibal? I better get going."

Hannibal gets up from his desk immediately. In the hall, Will waits, overshirt on and his expression almost shy. Hannibal wonders how forward he's expecting him to be.

"So - what were you thinking about - dinner?" Will asks. "Do you want to at least wait until the kitchen is finished and it's definitively outside of the realms of exploitation?"

"But what about the dining room?" Hannibal asks, feigning concern.

"My god, you're right. We might have to postpone."

Hannibal puts on a frown. "No, that won't do."

"There must be an agreeable compromise somewhere, Doctor."

"How many days is your sink refit? One? Two? Perhaps we ought to fit it in quickly."

"While I'm between jobs? That's slippery of you."

"I'm the most shameless of criminals, yes." Hannibal touches his arm lightly. "Say you will."

Will sighs, but it seems to be more at himself than anything. "Okay, sure."

"Good. Are we going out or am I cooking for us?"

"I - I don't know. Either."

Hannibal squeezes his elbow. "Your choice, Will."

The touch seems to startle him again. He looks at Hannibal's hand and swallows. "I think you cooking for me sounds like a lot of effort on your part and not much on mine."

"You put in plenty of effort to make my kitchen ready," Hannibal says.

"You paid me."

"Your company is payment enough."

"Oh, wow," Will chuckles.

"Will-" Hannibal murmurs.

Will looks up, acid falling away. Their eyes snag and hold. "Yeah," he says belatedly.

"I don't care about the effort, only you."

"Oh," Will says, flushing. "Oh." *Oh*, Hannibal echoes internally. "You're good at that, winning arguments with honesty," Will observes.

"How does that make you feel?" Hannibal asks solemnly.

"Like I'm going to have to sharpen up my act, I guess." Then he smiles. "I see what you were doing there, Hannibal."

"What was I doing?"

"You're lucky I put up with the therapist talk."

"A hard habit to break, I'm afraid."

Will hums, stance softening. He's comfortable again for some reason. "I know all about bad habits," he shrugs.

"I can't picture you with many."

"I have all sorts. I collect dogs, for starters."

Hannibal feigns surprise. "How large is the collection?"

"Seven," Will sighs. He's clearly had this conversation before.

"A lot of work for one person."

"I like work."

"I can tell." Hannibal smiles. "You like honesty. Dogs are incapable of anything but."

Will smiles up at him suddenly, looking both pleased and surprised. "Dogs don't expect me to talk, either."

"I'm terribly sorry," Hannibal half-smiles.

"It's all right, I can make the effort for the right person."

"I am delighted to hear it."

Will gives him a soft smile. "So - dinner. I'll be wrapped up here in a few days, give or take the last few special-order bits that need to come in. So maybe next week?"

Hannibal would like it to be sooner, but Will has made his requirements clear. He refrains from mentioning it.

"Tuesday," he says.

Will nods. "Tuesday sounds good."

"Come over at seven?"

"Sure." Will is smiling again, still cautious, but warm too.

"I suppose I ought to let you go now," Hannibal murmurs. He sees him hesitate.

"Won't be too long until I'm back again."

He knows, and he's glad of it. "Breakfast?" he asks. Will fixes him with a severe look. Hannibal cocks his head. "No?"

"If you keep insisting on feeding me, I'm discounting my rate."

"We shall see." He smiles at Will and takes a step back. "Goodnight."

Will reaches and touches his wrist gently. "I'll see you in the morning, Hannibal."

Hannibal lets him draw away, and watches him go.

*

Will considers shaving for dinner with Hannibal, but he doesn't want to be accused of false advertising: he has a beard the majority of the time. He's both proud of it, and fond of the way it looks. It's a security blanket, too. After a long-time gazing at his reflection in the mirror, he decides to leave it.

As a minor concession to Hannibal's tastes, he instead wears a dark button-down, ironed, and one of his less disgusting pairs of jeans. He does spend a few minutes taming his hair. He even puts on a blazer, and buys a bottle of wine - one that costs more than he's ever spent on wine in his life.

The man in the shop assured him it was a good quality, versatile vintage. Will doesn't care if it shows he made an effort. He wants to, he thinks. Both make one, and have it...appreciated.

Hannibal's appreciation is a tangible thing, heady and sweet. Will gets his first whiff when he shows up just before seven and Hannibal answers the door in his shirtsleeves and apron. He spends a noticeable moment just studying Will.

"Come in," he murmurs, stepping back to let him. They draw level in the hall, door still open, and Will feels pinned by all the naked admiration in his face.

"I -" he says breathlessly, "uh, wine, for you."

"That's very kind of you, Will." Hannibal takes the bottle, studying it for a second, then looks back at Will. "Lovely," he murmurs. That makes Will huff an embarrassed laugh.

"It's not that good, I didn't really know what I was looking for-"

"Hush," Hannibal murmurs with a smile. "I'm talking about you."

Will turns even more pink. "I know for a fact I'm not that good either."

"Beauty is in the eye of the beholder I suppose." He reaches out to touch Will's elbow. "A drink before dinner?"

"I shouldn't drink too much if I'm driving," Will murmurs, "something soft all right-?"

"Mineral water for now?"

Sure." Will nods. "You have whatever - don't abstain on my account."

"Very well," Hannibal replies. "Will you join me in the kitchen?"

"Oh - of course." He follows Hannibal through, looking around. "You've started unpacking. It looks great." It looks better than great. Will can't wait to photograph it for his portfolio.

Hannibal watches him with a smile. "You look proud."

"I worked hard on it," Will shrugs, reaching to touch the edge of the marble counter. He'd wet-shined it when it came and it's still gleaming. He knew Hannibal would take care of it.

Hannibal goes to the refrigerator and pours mineral water from a decanter into a glass of sparkling ice. Will thanks him, and then swallows some of his awkwardness with the first sip. "Everywhere looks great - and uh - you do, too." He feels his face get hot.

Hannibal radiates a different kind of warmth, pleased and humbled. "Thank you, Will." He hesitates like he's considering a step closer. Will fidgets, not sure what outcome he'd prefer.

"What's for dinner?"

"Beef Wellington," Hannibal replies. "My butcher had some excellent cuts of filet today."

"One of my favorites," Will murmurs, almost suspicious.

"It's in the oven, but I have to sauté the vegetables, if you would like to keep me company."

"I absolutely would. Anything I can help with?" He knows the answer is going to be no, but he says it anyway.

"You may provide the conversation topic," Hannibal says, tone charitable.

"No pressure," Will murmurs.

"I have every faith in you." Hannibal sets a pan on the gas, movements neat and smooth.

Will runs a hand through his hair - bad habit - and sits down to watch. "What keeps you in Maryland? I assume you've traveled a great deal."

"My work is here, and I find the social scene to be diverting enough." Hannibal glances at him.

"Is it?" Will says politely. "What sort of things do you enjoy?"

"I'm a fan of live music and opera. The Baltimore Philharmonic is one of the best, in my opinion, and there's a thriving theatre and opera scene."

"I've heard that." That's the best he can do - it's decidedly not his scene.

Hannibal gives him a curious once over. "Not a fan?"

"It's a little above my pay grade," Will says. He's a little unsure what Hannibal sees in him. He hopes it's not what he fears. It occurs to him that he could just ask. But that would be rude, wouldn't it?

"A self-imposed restriction, I think," Hannibal muses.

Will studies him as he chops. "My specialty."

"Is that so? I wouldn't have expected it of you."

"No? Why's that?"

"You seem singularly determined, at least to me."

"I could be both."

"True. Are you?"

"What do you think?"

"I think yes. I think you contain multitudes, as the saying goes. It's very interesting, you know."

"My multitudes? Not sure you'll find them interesting for long. They all do at first," Will can't hold back the little bit of bitterness: he's had this conversation before, a hundred different variations. "Unpredictability can be as exhausting as routine." He eyes Hannibal. "You strike me as a proponent of routine."

"I contain multitudes," Hannibal says, somewhat reproachfully. Will hates the tone of it, the slightly vulnerable look on his face.

"I look forward to seeing them all," he says eventually.

"Truth?" Hannibal says lightly.

"Of course." He can't help meeting Hannibal's eyes, though the sensation makes him squirm. It's worth it for the warm smile.

"Would you like to see the new dining table? I picked it to compliment the wood you ordered, I thought you might appreciate it. I had decorators in yesterday and today for the living room and upstairs, too."

"I'd love to see it all," Will murmurs. He's not sure, but Hannibal's gaze seems to go a touch more intensely focused.

"I'm sure I can accommodate that."

"After dinner, maybe."

Hannibal concedes with a nod. He reaches for a sauce pan and turns on the burner. "This won't be long."

"Can't wait." Will fidgets a bit, feeling out of place. Even without the finishing touches - Hannibal is still waiting on his wine fridge and Will on some parts for his storage solutions - the kitchen looks like a lifestyle magazine spread. And Hannibal cooks like a professional chef. It's quite a different set up to Will's well-loved but tired green and cream and oak back home.

His clients would be confused by his little house, he's sure. Not Hannibal, maybe. He seems to have Will quite figured out. And to like him, which is the stranger part. He's smiling at him now, taking a tray out of the oven and serving up beautifully presented pastries and various accompaniments Will can't quite fathom.

"If you'd follow me through to the dining room," he invites.

Will does, bringing a side dish at Hannibal's nod of permission. He stops for a moment in the doorway to admire the table. It really is a beautiful find. Hannibal's antique dealer must be a goddamn genius. After a moment, he says so.

"She really has quite an eye," Hannibal agrees, pouring Will a glass of wine after he's served him his dinner.

Will looks down at the pastry-wrapped filet on his plate, complete with sautéed vegetables and an artful swirl of sauce. "I have seen restaurant dishes that didn't look half this good," he compliments. "I'm not sure where to start."

"Start with whatever looks most delicious," Hannibal advises. He cuts neatly into his own Wellington.

Will follows suit. The first mouthful renders him somewhat speechless. He's just glad he didn't actually make a noise. Hannibal raises his chin in silent question, expression endearingly unsure: how is it?

He chews and swallows politely. "Hannibal, it's amazing." It gets him a warm smile. He suspects that the unsure expression was not wholly truthful. Hell, this is easily several hours' worth of cooking. He can fish for all the compliments he wants. "I can't remember the last time I ate something this good."

"Not a cook yourself?"

Will smiles. "Oh, I cook. It's nutritional. That's about it." He shrugs. "Mostly Southern food, I guess."

"Is that where you grew up?" Hannibal asks attentively.

"Louisiana. Spent a lot of time in New Orleans."

"A unique city," Hannibal comments. "I've visited before."

"It's a great vacation spot," Will agrees.

"Not a place you're interested in returning to?"

"Maybe one day. I like it here. Good fishing. I don't mind the weather."

"Fishing, hm?" Hannibal raises his eyebrows. "Is that one of the multitudes?"

Will grins at him. "I'm afraid so."

Hannibal returns his grin. "You think I'll find that off-putting."

Will takes a sip of his wine. "You don't?"

"Why would I? If my criteria for attraction were grounded in common hobbies and ideals, I'd be restricting myself and potential... persons of interest."

"What are your criteria, then?" Will mumbles.

Hannibal tilts his head. "I like multitudes, Will. I'm sure you've already gathered that."

"Yes, you've said."

Hannibal nods. "I can't be more specific than that I'm afraid, though I'd be lying if I said I hadn't found you to be alluring from the off."

Will snorts softly. "Ogling the contractor?"

"I'd say admiring," Hannibal shrugs.

"Semantics."

"Your word has a connotation I find distasteful."

"What's that? Prurience? I'm pretty used to it."

"Being in construction?" Hannibal raises his eyebrows.

"Sometimes." He wets his lips, knowing he's being deliberately obstructive. "So you weren't ogling me even a little?"

"I can't tell what answer you are hoping to receive, Will."

"Just the truth is fine."

"I was not," Hannibal says. "I did not intend -" Will waits, tilting his head. "To indulge myself in this way."

Will sees him then, the way he sees his own face in the foggy mirror of his mind: self imposed loneliness, for one reason or another. The doctor talks of attending social functions, yes, but Will knows somehow that this is the truth of it.

"Should I be insulted or flattered?" he asks, gently.

"You should be anything you wish," Hannibal replies. "However, I have come to a quite wholehearted sense of admiration."

Will's face turns pink, unbidden.

"Yes, you have, haven't you?" Hannibal tilts his head, expression asking for elaboration. "Breaking your own rules for me," Will murmurs.

A nod. "Unheard of for me, I confess." It's said lightly, but Will can sense the underlying consternation.

"I want to promise I'll be worth it, but I don't know that I will," he confesses quietly.

Hannibal sips his wine, considering. No false platitudes from that quarter. "'Worth it' is down to individual interpretation, mine quite different than yours, I'd wager."

"Yes, I imagine you're correct."

Hannibal smiles at him. "Tell me about yourself, Will. You said you live in Wolf Trap?"

He nods. "For several years now." He realizes he's being deliberately cagey and tries to shake it off. "Just an old farmhouse. Lots of land, an old barn that I use as a workshop, a lot of leftover equipment I don't use. Some I do. There's a river not far, plenty of deer and such around. Really good place."

"It sounds peaceful."

"Not so much with the dogs, but it's not bad." He smiles, and Hannibal echoes it.

"And what did you do before you went into this trade?"

Will smiles down at his meal. "No guesses?"

"I honestly have no idea."

"I was a police officer."

"A sudden departure from a career that can be hard to get out of." Hannibal politely doesn't ask why he ‘departed’.

"It wasn't working." He wasn't working. Not like before.

"There's no need to explain yourself," Hannibal assures.

"I -" Well, yes, he was, wasn't he? Hannibal gives him that smile again, the one from his eyes that feels more genuine than any other Will's seen from him.

"No interest in returning to law enforcement?"

"No, I like to work for myself," Will says. "Besides, that work... it wasn't good for me."

"How so?"

"My mental health suffered, I found it... haunting." Will comes just short of casual.

"Many first responders suffer from compassion fatigue," Hannibal says knowledgeably. "But you mean -"

"The opposite, really."

That makes Hannibal's thoughtful head tilt practically horizontal. He politely doesn't probe further, just nods. "Perhaps a good job that you withdrew, then."

"It's a good job for your kitchen," Will half-smiles.

"I also see the personal benefit. The world is a more interesting place for having you in it." He doesn't dwell on it; in fact, he changes the subject immediately, which must mean he's reading Will much better than expected. "I myself found surgery to be similarly draining. Fixing things is demanding enough of our mental efforts without the physical ones sometimes resulting in death."

Will nods. "Your odds of prevention are probably still better though."

"Certainly. More so now I'm a psychiatrist."

Will hums. Finally coming unspelled from his dinner, he reaches out and takes a sip of his wine. That too is extraordinarily good.

Hannibal keeps talking, describing an article he's working on for a journal. It's interesting, and Will likes to watch his plump mouth move around the words. He's thinking of kissing him before he can stop himself. And once he's thinking of it, it's very difficult to stop.

Hannibal seems to notice he's lost the thread of the conversation. "Enough about that, though."

"It's all right," Will murmurs.

"While I find an interest in one's work imperative to a healthy balance, I confess I occasionally fall into the workaholic category," Hannibal says in a guilty tone. Then he smiles. "You're enjoying your meal."

"It's - fantastic." Will smiles.

"I'm hoping it is the first of many."

"Are you now."

"I am, in fact."

"We've shared a few breakfasts," Will shrugs.

"Yes, true." Hannibal touches his wrist gently. It startles Will a little bit; the pang of his heart in his chest even more so.

He gives Hannibal a smile, face going hot. "I'd like to - perhaps you could come to mine for dinner next time."

"I'd be delighted, Will." He stands to take Will's plate, returning with the next course on a tray. It's a beautiful salad, and Will smiles.

"Very European, Doctor."

"We are what we eat," Hannibal muses.

"I suppose that's true." Will looks down at the plate. "I'm sure there's a clever double entendré set up there, Doctor."

"I trust that you could find it if you were interested."

"I'm only coming up with the crude jokes at the minute I'm afraid."

Hannibal's lips quirk. "Shame."

"Sorry to disappoint."

"I'm anything but." He seats himself and takes a bite of his own salad, still smiling faintly.

Will watches him from under his lashes. The more he watches him, the more attractive he finds his movements to be. Controlled, expressive only in their tiny variations from a central stillness. He even likes watching him take in the bouquet of his wine before he takes a sip. Everything about him is careful.

"So you went to Johns Hopkins, Hannibal?" he asks, to divert himself from staring much longer.

"Yes, I did. As I did my initial degree in Italy, the medical school was very accommodating."

"You must have been quite something."

"I don't know if I can answer that without sounding overly proud," Hannibal replies.

"I don't mind. I've been occasionally accused of arrogance."

"Did they emerge unscathed?" Hannibal asks.

"Not emotionally, I suspect. They're right though, I can admit my flaws."

"A healthy attitude."

"It's taken a while to get there." Will offers a smile with the words.

"All good changes are hard to make."

"Are they?"

"They certainly are." Hannibal smiles. "I speak from experience."

"Tell me more, that sounds like a story," Will says.

Hannibal considers, and then concedes with a nod. "I was an angry young man. The deaths of my parents left me traumatized and mentally misshapen. I was an intelligent student and a keen learner, but I had a violent streak, triggered easily in the right settings. It took me a long time to understand that sometimes to fix a problem you must find the source."

"How long did it take you?" Will murmurs.

"A long time. I still see a therapist even now."

"Therapists must be great therapy patients," Will smiles crookedly. Hannibal mirrors it, more neatly. Will recognizes now, in the subtle movements of his hands and face, that he's been doing it all night. Maybe they both have. He knows enough to know what that means.

"Are you a great therapy patient, Will?" Hannibal asks.

Will laughs. "No. I know all the tricks and I don't cooperate."

"I am completely unsurprised."

He shrugs, leaning back. "I've got 'awkward' written all over me." Hannibal's glance tells him he doesn't necessarily agree. He wants to know what word Hannibal sees, but it’s not a question he thinks he can ask. Not without embarrassing himself.

"Your awkwardness is a side effect of being sure of yourself, I suspect," Hannibal says finally, "it’s others’ inability to recognize you that frustrates."

"Sounds like you’re as sure of me as I am."

"Was it hard won knowledge, or did you always know yourself?"

"Both, in some ways. How about you?"

"There were cloudy spells, same as anyone."

"You're very clear now, too," Will tells him.

Hannibal smiles. "I like to think so."

His expression makes Will think of sharp things. Birds of prey. However gently he eventually takes hold, Will has no doubt that he'll be thoroughly caught. Probably better to make it quick.

Hannibal, who's watching him very closely as he eats, clearly marks the shift in Will's expression. He tops up his wine, just a tad, and gets up to take their plates. "Would you like a break before dessert?"

"A bit of a walk around?" Will says.

"I can show you the progress the decorators have made upstairs."

"Yes, of course." Will sets his napkin aside and stands. He feels compelled by politeness to help clear the table. But as before, watching Hannibal move around his kitchen is completely absorbing. "What's for dessert?" He asks.

"Caramelized pears," Hannibal says. "Or it will be. I'll prepare it for us when we are ready."

Will watches his shoulders as he washes up their plates briskly. He's taken his coat back off to do dishes, but not his waistcoat. He's so trim; Will wants to touch him. Almost entirely without his permission, his hand moves forward, fingers brushing the neat dip of his waist.

Hannibal stills immediately. Will's breath stalls. He can't pull back, not without looking like he regrets it. He steps forward; fits his palm more neatly against his waist and squeezes gently. "Just going to the bathroom before you get started on your tour."

"Very well," Hannibal murmurs.

Will stares at himself in the mirror of the washroom as he washes his hands, wondering why he felt the need to bring a dose of 'creepy weirdo' to the evening. He just... couldn't help himself. When he returns to the kitchen, Hannibal is waiting, hands dry and clasped in front of him. His face shows nothing Will can easily read. Will tries a smile, but he's not sure it's successful.

Hannibal comes to him in three swift steps and reaches out, fingers just grazing his chest. "You're allowed to touch me, Will."

"I didn't ask first," Will mumbles, flushing.

"And I know that's important to you. Would it be uncouth to say I'm glad I make you forget yourself?"

Will bites his lip. "Nothing you do is uncouth." Hannibal gives him a look that disputes it. Will wavers - visibly, he's sure. "Can we walk now?"

"Of course. Let me show you the music room."

Will has to smile. Of course there's a music room. He follows Hannibal up the stairs, biting his lip at the view the whole way. It's probably beneath him, especially after his teasing about ogling, but he doesn't particularly care.

The landing is still unpainted, strips of paper taped to the walls. Hannibal has unusual taste. Will already knew that, of course. From his herb wall, if nothing else. Will stares unabashedly at the doors on the upstairs landing, curious about each one.

Hannibal leads him into a light, open room, the walls busy with paintings and an unusual oriental wallpaper by the windows. The furniture is similarly elegant, a gorgeous inlaid harpsichord taking up the central space.

Will goes to it immediately. "Wow. Rosewood?"

"A good eye."

Will smiles again. "May I touch it?"

"Of course." Will tries not to think of more double entendres as he bends low to examine the grain. It's a beautiful harpsichord, hand carved detail on the paneling. "Do you play?" Hannibal asks.

"Ah, the piano, a little."

Hannibal nods. "Same general idea of course."

"Of course." Will steps back even so - he's not convinced Hannibal deserves the torture of him trying to remember college level piano. He meanders to look at the rest of the room. There's another contraption in the corner, rather incongruous to the rest of the room, a loop of wire and an antenna that Will recognizes as a Theremin. He smiles at the sight of it, surprised. "More fanciful than I would have expected, this."

"I have been known to be fanciful on occasion."

"I did notice the wallpapers in the hall, as well," Will smiles.

"Perhaps you can give me your opinion on the least fanciful."

"If you like." Will returns his attention to the Theremin, curious.

"Would you care to try it?" Hannibal asks. He's closer than he was a moment ago.

"Show me how to do it," Will laughs, "don't just leave me alone with it." Hannibal smiles too, touching his shoulder as he moves past. He turns it on and stands behind him.

"Really, Hannibal?"

"Don't worry, I'll help you."

Will swallows thickly. "All right." Feeling Hannibal behind him makes his breath come short. He lets him cup his elbows, guiding his hands.

"The volume is the loop on the left, the pitch is the right. Put your hand on the loop." Will obeys, letting Hannibal move his arms, fingers trembling slightly. "As you raise your hand, it will raise the volume. With your right hand, moving it toward the pole, you control the pitch." He guides Will's hands, and the Theremin makes a high, mournful sound, almost like a human vocalization. He tenses, then repeats the motion. "Good," Hannibal murmurs, voice closer than Will expected. His fingers curl, and the note changes slightly.

Will experiments for a few minutes before letting his hands drop to his sides, and Hannibal reaches around him to complete his melody. As with everything, he does it artfully, fluid and effortless as if he were strumming imaginary strings. Will only wishes he could see his face at that moment.

"Is there anything you aren't good at?" he murmurs. He's savoring the closeness, he knows; Hannibal's warmth against his back.

"Nothing I'll willingly admit to. Anything worth doing is worth doing well." His breath touches Will's neck.

"What's your criteria for how worthy something is of uh - doing?"

"If it interests me. Nothing more." Will peers back at him. Hannibal levelly meets his gaze. "Did you enjoy the Theremin?"

"I liked it once you started playing it." He watches Hannibal's lips curve. He's taken aback by his own susceptibility to him. And by his own lack of self control. He can feel himself quivering.

"Would you like me to continue?" Hannibal murmurs.

"Maybe later. Show me the rest of the house."

Hannibal nods. It almost physically pains Will to let him pull away. How shameless can he possibly be in one evening; he wonders. The thought makes his face burn. He listens to Hannibal talk about some of the paintings in the music room with his hindbrain writhing in self-loathing.

After a few minutes Hannibal pauses. "Let's move on."

Will follows him, fidgeting nervously. He's sure one of the rooms is the master bedroom. His imagination scarcely needs the help. Maybe Hannibal wouldn't find that appropriate. Maybe he would.

He soon finds out. Hannibal opens a final door on the landing.

"… And the master is through here. Most of this came with me, but the paint is new."

Will stands on the threshold, peering into Hannibal's bedroom and finding the concept thrilling and too intimate all at once. Hannibal doesn't steer him this time. He just stands, watching Will like he's expecting him to bolt. Will grits his teeth. He steps into the room, turning on the spot. Hannibal's room is deep greens and silvers, with the same still air of a temple.

"It's beautiful," he says.

"It needs warming up, I think."

"Do you have something in mind?"

"I'd thought of some lighting. Copper, perhaps."

"Wall sconces?" Will asks despite himself.

"That might work."

"Antique, refitted for modern bulbs," Will says absently, wandering over to look at the fireplace.

"I like how you think." Hannibal straightens an errant frame on the wall. "Perhaps when you find my lighting designer, they can do those too."

Will clenches his jaw. "Perhaps. Has this fireplace been cleaned?"

"Not the chimney, no. Why do you ask?"

"It's dangerous to use it until it's been inspected and cleaned. I just wanted to make sure you didn't."

"I'll see that it gets done at once." He tilts his head, looking curious. "Are you all right?"

Will nods. The absurd flush of jealousy he feels at the thought of Hannibal having someone else in his house - someone else he looks at like he's been looking at Will - is enough to choke him. He grimaces at himself. "I'm - I could get the wall sconces."

Hannibal nods. "Kind of you to offer. You’re already looking into my chandelier refit, I suppose."

"Yeah. I can fit them; it's - it's not a problem. I'll start working on sourcing something nice, now that I've seen it. Here and here?" he gestures to spots along the wall.

"Sounds perfect." Hannibal watches him. He wets his lips. "Not keen on sharing work?" Will fixes him with an assessing look and Hannibal's smile grows sly. "Something else?"

"I don't think this conversation is going to end well for me," Will mutters.

"That's because you find vulnerability challenging; most people do." He relents, then. "I find it flattering, in any case."

Will can feel himself flushing red. "That's probably not a good thing."

"No?"

"Probably."

"Even if I like it?"

Will gives him a serious look. "Don't encourage me." Hannibal's expression promises nothing, and Will scrubs a hand through his hair. "I'm sorry."

"Don't be." Hannibal steps toward him again. Will swallows. If he touches Will in here...

He steps back. "Tell me about the armor?"

Hannibal obligingly describes how he came to have it. It's the first time Will hears about Hannibal's aunt, who was apparently some sort of Japanese nobility, but he's hard-pressed to give the story his full attention despite absorbing every word. He's still watching Hannibal; his hipward lean in the direction of the armor, and then the re-centering of his attention on Will, his body like a weathervane. Will feels the magnetism of it.

This time when Hannibal takes a step, Will stays put. He doesn't stop until they're firmly in one another's personal space. Will makes himself square up a little. The story of the samurai warrior is still running through the back of his mind, but Hannibal's fingers curling around his elbow drive it far away.

He wants to make a noise, to frighten away the heavy tension that's been over them all night - since the instant Hannibal came into the garden bearing chilled water and a smile that made something forgotten but familiar bloom in Will's chest. He doesn't, just lets his own fingers brush Hannibal's sleeve. He doesn't look away from Will's face, and Will takes a shaky breath.

"You look well in this room," Hannibal tells him. His thumb soothes gently against the rise of bone it finds. Will's heart is pounding.

"Why's that?"

"The colors suit you, and your eyes have completely changed tone from how they looked in the music room... it's fascinating."

That makes Will smile a bit. He wonders if that's a line. "What color are they now?"

Hannibal's own roam slowly over his face. "Green. Very light, like jade."

"Makes sense, given our conversation before."

Hannibal smiles. He lifts his other hand, brushing Will's hair gently from his eyes. "In the garden, they looked yellow in the sun."

"I didn't know you were paying that kind of attention."

"I was."

"Still are," Will comments softly.

"Would you rather I stopped?"

"I didn't say that."

"It's a question worth asking, nonetheless."

Will's deep breath seems to bring them even closer. "I don't want you to stop," he murmurs.

"Then you have my assurance I won't." His fingers brush Will's hair back again, thumb grazing his cheek.

It still makes him want to run. But Will recognizes the impulse in himself, and it's longstanding and undoubtedly worth ignoring, if he wants this. God, he does. He wants it enough that it's paralyzing him. He knows Hannibal is waiting for him to move. So he does, tilting he cheek into his waiting palm, squeezing his bicep gently.

For a frustrating moment, Hannibal does absolutely nothing more than stroke his cheek. Then he leans in. Will's breath stutters at his proximity. Hannibal's own breath seems thin, anticipatory, and Will's confidence frays the longer he hovers.

When their lips touch it's like his nerve endings go white. Hannibal's palm cups his cheek, every touch careful as they kiss. When his other hand migrates from elbow to waist, Will sways into it. Hannibal grips, deepening the kiss with a swipe of his tongue that makes Will positively weak at the knees. Hannibal kisses like he does everything else - with total absorption.

Will makes a soft noise against his mouth, shocked at the ferocity of his response. It's as if he's a man starving, fed by Hannibal’s touch. It takes him a solid few seconds to psych himself up to pull back. When he does, he's breathless. Their eyes meet and snag. Hannibal looks pleased with himself even with a carefully blank expression.

"I hope to do that again," he murmurs, managing to sound both polite and confident.

"Encouraging," Will quips. Hannibal tugs on a curl, somewhat reprovingly. It makes Will's stomach lurch with heat. "Can do it again now if you want."

"Come back downstairs with me," Hannibal murmurs.

Will bites his lip. "Seems sensible."

Hannibal strokes through his hair one more time, very much as if he just can't help touching. They pull apart to head back downstairs, though Will pauses on the landing to inspect the wallpapers. Some of them are crazy silkscreen inspired patterns, gold and overt. Not landing appropriate, perhaps. He taps the one with a subtle birchbark-inspired design. Hannibal glances back and smiles. "Like that one?"

"I think it's your best bet for this space. Not too busy."

"All right." Hannibal smiles.

Will quirks his brows at him. "You don't have to listen to me."

"I didn't disagree."

"I know." He smiles crookedly. "Also, I'm right."

"If you say so." He can tell from Hannibal's expression that he's making a joke, though he isn't sure someone else could. He grins helplessly, surprised by how endearing he can find strangeness with the right motivation. He has every motivation, with Hannibal.

They tread back downstairs, to the kitchen. "Another drink? Coffee?" Hannibal asks.

"Dessert?" Will asks hopefully.

"Of course. While you wait?"

Will smiles, "You know I love your coffee."

Hannibal goes about fixing a pot. Will takes a seat at the bar again. When Hannibal slides him the cup, he's smiling. Will makes sure their fingers touch.

Hannibal offers his hand. It strikes Will as strange that things could be so simple as to ask and receive. But Hannibal's eyes are filled with an easy affection, and he lets Will link their fingers. "Thank you," Will murmurs. He's not sure he just means for the coffee. He's not positive Hannibal thinks he means that, either.

"Anytime." He lifts Will's hand and kisses the back. Will can't quite silence the little stutter of his breath. He blushes. He's not sure when he forgot how to be forward about what he wants.

Hannibal squeezes his hand gently and turns back to start the gas for his saucepan, and Will's gaze lingers on the lines of his back and shoulders. He sips his coffee and watches their dessert come together. Hannibal turns the heat down after a few minutes and produces bowls and a dark, glossy sauce from the fridge.

"Merlot sauce," he says, assembling the dessert with the level of concentration Will typically puts into fly-tying.

"It smells amazing."

"Shall we take it to the library?" Hannibal asks when he's finished.

"Sure." The library. Jesus. This is an enormous house for one person, as beautiful as it is - or will be. Will thinks about it as he follows Hannibal with their respective drinks, excessively careful. "This place goes on for miles. Do you have a lot of visitors-?"

"You and Alana, thus far." Hannibal sounds casual about it.

"No kids? Ex wife? Ex husband?"

"No, nothing at all." Hannibal walks over to a low table and deposits his tray.

"I find that - an injustice to you."

"Surely it is my choice?" Hannibal murmurs.

"Of course," Will nods quickly. "I didn't mean... I don't know what I meant. I'm just surprised. You have a lot of qualities."

"Positive and negative, I assure you." Hannibal sits gracefully and crosses his legs at the knee, handing Will a bowl before picking up his own.

"I didn't mean to offend you." Will tries to communicate his utter sincerity in his expression.

"You didn't," Hannibal assures him softly. He touches his thigh lightly when Will chooses to join him on the settee. "Eat," he murmurs.

Will does. He tastes caramel, wine, and chocolate. The pears themselves are mild and sweet underneath it all. Will sighs in content. He doesn't stop eating until the bowl is empty. He notices Hannibal is watching him rather than his own, smiling secretively. Will meets his eyes.

"You look like you're enjoying it."

"Is it that obvious?"

"I can look away if you'd like to lick the bowl."

"I don't know if I trust you to," Will teases him.

"I'm sure that's wise." He licks his own lips.

Will follows the swipe of his tongue. "Hannibal," he says helplessly.

"Will."

"You're… distracting."

"What is it I'm distracting you from?"

"The remnants of my self-control."

"I prefer you distracted in that case."

Will's bowl hits the tabletop with a loud clunk. Hannibal sets his down beside it, and moves his hand back to Will's knee with more purpose as their lips touch again, a soft brush and a catch of breaths. Will bravely slides his arms around Hannibal's neck this time to keep him close, their thighs touching. Hannibal's hands find his back, stronger than Will expected. He knows his own are both strong and rough.

Hannibal presses a few more errant kisses to the corner of his mouth and murmurs, "You taste of pears."

"How curious, I wonder why."

Hannibal nips at his lip. "Impertinent."

"I've been called worse. Kiss me again."

Hannibal does. Will lets him haul him in closer, their knees slotting together on the couch. He sighs in sheer relief: he'd forgotten the sensation of wanting to be touched. Having Hannibal's contact is like burning oil over cool water. He hears the hiss in his ears even as Hannibal's breath hitches. His hand spears into Will's hair. Feeling the first shred of uncontrolled contact makes Will moan softly against his mouth. He feels it ripple through Hannibal's body, and his hands tighten on Will.

It's not enough. Will wants. He shouldn't want. He tightens his hand on Hannibal's collar, the other seeking skin. Damn this man and his waistcoats, his complicated ties. He skirts his fingers underneath and ravels up the fabric of his shirt to touch. Hannibal's response is immediate, muscles jumping.

"Okay-?" Will murmurs.

"Yes," Hannibal breathes. "Are you?"

"I'm - yeah, I'm." He stops. He's nervous. He's feeling threatened by his own desire. He thinks with Hannibal that might be par for the course.

"Tell me what you need."

"Help slowing down," Will murmurs. "I'm sorry."

Hannibal nods, fingertips skimming his jaw. "Don't apologize." He kisses Will again, more softly this time, just at the corner of his mouth.

"I'm... feeling okay at the minute, and I'd like to not jeopardize that too much by, y'know, rushing."

Hannibal pulls back far enough to look at him, so that Will can see the warmth in his eyes. "That seems sensible."

He presses their cheeks together. "I don't want to jeopardize anything."

Hannibal sighs and holds his cheek gently. It's the sweetest thing Will could imagine. He closes his eyes gratefully.

"Thank you for being honest," Hannibal murmurs.

"I'm sorry," Will says again.

"I prefer it this way."

"You do?"

"I want you to be comfortable. And certain."

"I am certain," Will assures him softly.

"Comfortable, then."

Will nods. "Yes, that."

Hannibal smiles. "I'm thinking of getting a pond fitted in the garden," he says then, apropos to nothing.

"I don't do ponds," Will says automatically, then laughs at himself. He's been thoroughly sidetracked. When he glances at Hannibal he looks fiercely amused.

"No, but I thought you could advise me on reliable landscapers."

"I know some people." Will nods. It's only after he's asked four or five follow up questions that it strikes him that he's still sitting practically in Hannibal's lap, that he hasn't given a thought to moving. Hannibal doesn't seem worried about that either. Without thinking about it too much, he ducks his head for another kiss.

Hannibal hums in content. "This is how I often think of you," he admits quietly.

"How's that?"

"Talking quietly with me, giving me soft touches. My imagination hadn’t done you justice."

A phantom hand cups Will's heart and gently squeezes. He lays his cheek against Hannibal's shoulder. "You've been thinking a lot about me."

"Forgive me?"

"God, yes."

"Dare I hope it's been mutual?"

The uncertainty surprises Will. "I think about you when I'm walking my dogs, and when I'm drinking my shitty instant coffee, and when I'm looking at the ceiling trying to fall asleep. I think about you when the light outside makes the room yellow before I set off to work - to come here. And then I see you."

Hannibal's breath shakes out in a distinct exhale. He strokes one big hand gently down Will's spine. "It appears the attraction is mutual."

"It does." Will sighs. He's - surprised. Dumbfounded. Horribly hopeful.

Hannibal touches his hair gently. Will lets him for a while longer, and then he leans back.

"I have a long drive home," he says regretfully.

"I shall be sure to come to yours next time, or we can find somewhere agreeable to meet."

Will bites his lip thoughtfully. "I'll be back for the feature wall later this week, though."

Hannibal nods. "I'm eagerly anticipating it. Should I have the walls painted before you put it in or after?"

"Before," Will says. "If I nick the paint, I'll touch it up."

"'But I won't,' I believe is the end of that statement," Hannibal smiles.

"I'm only human." But he knows the arrogance carried through that statement, and he doesn't want to recant it.

Hannibal smiles at him. "I think you might be more."

Will laughs. "Nope."

"Indulge me, Will."

"Well, I suppose you deserve it."

"Do I?" He looks tired for a second then. Will brushes his lower lip with his thumb.

"You do, Hannibal." Finally, he makes himself disengage after one last kiss. "I better be on my way."

"I'll walk you out."

Will lets him, curiously warm as Hannibal's hand finds the small of his back. It keeps them close as they reach Will's truck. Hannibal leans in for another kiss.

"Thank you for dinner," Will murmurs.

"You are welcome, any time."

Will bites his lip. "I'll see you in a few days, right?"

"Yes, of course." Hannibal opens his door for him.

Will gets into the truck, already wondering if he's made the right choice but - he needs to feel certain. He's got no doubts about Hannibal, but he doesn't deserve the backlash of Will's regret.

He lifts a hand, watching Will back out of his driveway. Will waves and pulls back onto the road. He watches Hannibal shrink in his rear view and feels a tug in his stomach. Regret coils around want like snakes writhing. He thinks that's good. Clarity is good. The regret is a constant companion, rearing its head whenever he lets anyone get close.

He might not need to regret Hannibal, yet, says a quiet voice in his head. It's a soft hiss under the rest, like the serpent of want making its feelings known. He pushes it down. Not yet. Take it easy. Go slow. It was easy enough tonight, with Hannibal's accepting presence. He sighs at the thought.

Maybe that's what's frustrating him, the lack of disappointment he could feel from Hannibal. It wasn't indifference though - far from it. It was easy to see it as just - face value. Hannibal - understands him. Maybe. He thinks. And oh, he hopes so hard.

Back at the house, when the drive and the endless questions have wound him up, he pours himself a drink after he's fed the dogs. He takes it to a chair on the porch. Buster immediately leaps into his lap, and Will settles all of them with a few soft noises. He strokes Buster's silky ears and looks out over the dark fields.

Mist is rolling in over the grass, blue with shadow. It's peaceful here. He's always thought so. It feels far enough away from everyone that they're safe - that he's safe. Though safe, he knows, is always relative. That night when he wakes sweating through the sheets and flinching from crepuscular figures in his dreams, he reflects on this fact for a long time. Eventually he gets back to sleep.

Chapter 3

Hannibal has had the dining room painted when Will next arrives, as per their agreement. He's anticipating his reaction to the scheme and textures he's chosen - either silent appreciation or more vocal ribbing. Will has taste, and it’s specific. Hannibal is anticipating seeing the flash of his tongue as he licks his lips in consideration. He's... simply anticipating seeing him again.

On the night they'd had dinner, Will had been mentally opaque to Hannibal in a way he often was, but physically he'd been transformative; freer than Hannibal could have predicted. Hannibal can be patient about the mental walls; after all, he is a therapist. But he can't forget the way Will's hair felt between his fingers. He is remembering the feeling now, as he answers the door to Will.

"Good morning, Will," he murmurs.

"Hi - hi." Will looks flustered and shy, which Hannibal finds endearing though he knows it to be - in part - affectation. God knows Will tolerates enough of Hannibal's own. Hannibal can't help but admire this carefully constructed persona, though: just enough falsehoods twined amidst his true nature to throw someone off, it's more an exaggeration of traits than complete fabrication. Cool, distant, discourteous - to keep people away. Now he wants to encourage Hannibal's affection, he's unassuming, deferential, blush-ridden. Appetizing. He wants the real Will, though, and knows he's not trusted enough to see him yet.

In the kitchen, as Hannibal supplies him with his coffee, his throat bobs on a swallow like he's choked on his words. "How have you been?" he asks Hannibal, quietly.

"I've been well, thanks. Have you? I considered texting you but wasn't sure if you'd like that."

Will's face twitches: confusion. "Why wouldn't I like it?"

"You're very protective of your private time, I think."

Will shrugs softly, then smiles. "Doesn't mean I'd be unappreciative of contact. Text me - or call me - whenever you like, Hannibal."

Hannibal smiles and sips his own coffee. Genuine, that time. Will's smiles usually are. "I'll bear that in mind." He'll try not to take advantage. "Would you like some breakfast, Will?" Hannibal asks.

Will looks up from his coffee. "Oh, you don't have to do that."

"I'm going to make myself some," Hannibal explains, "it's no effort." He gives Will a reassuring smile. "I could call you in when it's ready."

Will gives him another soft, surprised smile. "All right."

Satisfied that he's found the correct response, Hannibal begins an inspection of his fridge. Will starts unloading wood from the truck. Hannibal watches him through the kitchen windows as he sets up his table saw, then starts carrying boards inside.

His beard is a little shorter, but his hair is curling around his ears and the nape of his neck. Hannibal appreciates it. He'd noticed the other night when they had dinner, that Will had tidied his beard and hair, but he hadn't commented at the time. He wants to tell him he appreciates the effort, but doesn't want to imply it's necessary.

He finds he likes Will exactly as he is. Especially today, when his eyes are grateful to take in the sight of him again. Even wearing his typical worn Henley and paint-spattered cargo pants. Hannibal stares a moment longer, then applies himself to breakfast.

In deference to Will's work schedule, he makes him something holdable, arranging his own meal on a plate. He goes out and stands on the doorstep for a moment, watching him again for a few seconds before he speaks. "Will? Breakfast."

"Oh!" Will blinks, pulls his glasses off. "Sorry, I got wrapped up."

"I made you a breakfast sandwich," Hannibal says, offering a napkin-wrapped bundle.

Will comes to take it off him with a little duck of his head. "Thank you so much."

"Any time."

"Be careful with that. It'll be breakfast and massages daily."

"I hesitated to mention it..." Hannibal says with a little smile. Will tilts his head. Hannibal lets him look for a moment, keeping his expression clear and easy. "Anything you might want... physically, Will, you have only to ask, or to give your permission."

The admittance seems to startle him. "It's - you really go all in, huh?"

"I see little point in denying myself the things I desire."

Will's cheeks color. "I know and - that's flattering. I'm just sorry if I don't always know how to ask."

"I hope you will become comfortable enough," Hannibal says.

Will bites his lip, then smiles. "Can I ask you to have dinner with me again-?"

"I'd hoped you would."

"Maybe we could do a Saturday - go to the city and... go to an art gallery or something."

Hannibal is touched. "I'd like that very much."

He gets a warm smile, one he likes very much as well. "Great. Thanks for the sandwich."

"I'll go to my office now, so you can get to work."

Will nods, taking a bite of the sandwich as he turns back to his bench, his face going pleased at the taste. Hannibal goes to retrieve his own breakfast. He can't watch Will work all day, unfortunately. He eats; finishes getting ready for work. He has a couple of appointments this morning. He stops outside to say goodbye to Will before he leaves.

"Will you be back before I go?" Will asks, mildly.

"I believe so." Hannibal adjusts his shirt cuffs absently.

"Good." Will visibly hesitates, but he lets go of whatever impulse he's mulling on. "Have a good day."

"You as well." Hannibal inclines his head and opens his car door. He wonders about that moment of pause. He suspects it would have been some sort of contact, had Will not stopped himself. He revisits the moment throughout the day, in private moments. He's no more confident of the reasoning behind it by the end of the day.

That afternoon when he returns home, Will is in the garden again, though he looks to have made considerable headway with the dining room wall. Hannibal walks carefully around a small pile of discarded boards and cut offs, loosening his tie. In the garden, Will is sawing again, brow and collarbones sweat glossed. Hannibal waits until he's finished to call a hello.

Will raises his glasses and waves, stripping off his gloves and coming toward the house. "Hi, do you want to see the progress?"

"I'd love to."

Will leads him in. Hannibal tries to pretend he isn't looking at the spots where damp cotton clings to his back. Will is gorgeously proportioned; narrow waist and broad shoulders. Hannibal can't help but appreciate him. He pauses in the doorway of the dining room when Will does.

"The joins in the corners have taken me a while and it'll need sealing once it's in place, but it's beautiful wood," Will is saying, pointing out the neat grooves in the planks.

"This is where you connected the drainage pipes?" Hannibal points to a section of the wall that's still uncovered.

Will nods. "I did that part first." He shrugs. "The sealant still needs to dry."

"It's incredibly fast work. You'll be done tomorrow, it seems."

"It'll need stain too, that'll take a while. And lining. And soil." He grins.

"And plants," Hannibal murmurs. "I suppose that will be my contribution."

"I can certainly get you some, if it's easier." Will shrugs. "Y'know, in a. Friendly capacity. I know you're busy."

"Perhaps we could go together."

Will's eyes warm. "Good idea."

"Tomorrow?" Hannibal offers.

"Sure, if you're free. We'll take the truck, so you don't get soil in your car."

Hannibal reaches out to trail his fingers along the top of one of the plant troughs. "You're staining them to match the table, yes?"

"What do you take me for, Doctor?" Hannibal glances up at the tone, but Will's eyes are amused.

"A rhetorical question, I assure you."

"Mm-hm." Will's lips twitch. "I'm nearly done for this afternoon, anyway. How was your day?"

"Much as usual. My lectures went well."

"What is it you lecture on?"

"Psychology courses, mostly graduate level. Nothing at the medical school. Sadly, my surgical knowledge is several years out of date at this point."

"You don't strike me as the kind to let things pass you by."

"Oh, I still keep up with the journals," Hannibal assures him. "It's practical applications I'm inexperienced in."

"You did okay with at least one of those," Will murmurs, looking down.

"Which was that?" Hannibal tilts his head and Will rolls his shoulders automatically. Hannibal quirks a smile of understanding. "Perhaps that too, before you leave."

Will flushes and nods. Hannibal isn't sure it counts as asking, but he'll allow it.

"Is it troubling you now?"

"Carrying that sink around yesterday probably did it," Will grouses.

It makes Hannibal smile. "The sawing won't have helped. Come into the kitchen with me," he murmurs. Will does without his usual stuttering. Hannibal goes to a drawer where he keeps a bottle of hand cream. "Sit down and take your shirt off for me," he directs softly.

Will's ears turn pink. "I - I probably don't smell that great, Hannibal-"

"I have a very keen sense of smell, Will. A healthy sweat is nothing to be ashamed of."

"I don't know that I'm reassured by that."

Hannibal would offer him a shower, but he senses several potential speed bumps in that plan. Truthfully, he somewhat relishes the scent of him, working with his hands to give Hannibal what he wants. There's something pure in it. So he just fixes Will with a steady glance until he reaches for the cotton hem.

"All right," he shrugs, and then he pulls it over his head in one twisting motion.

Hannibal steers him onto a stool with a sigh. He squeezes a bit of lotion into his palm and warms it thoroughly.

He can hear reluctant amusement in Will's voice when he gets his hands on him. "You just keep lotion in your kitchen?"

"I keep lotion anywhere I tend to wash my hands frequently." He cups Will's shoulders and squeezes.

"Oh-" Will tenses initially, then sighs, "of course you do."

"It's a holdover from my surgical days, I suppose." Will's shoulders are indeed riddled with knots.

"I suppose," Will stretches a bit as Hannibal pinches with forefinger and thumb. "Ow-"

"I apologize," Hannibal murmurs.

"It's all right."

"Hurts to mend," Hannibal replies absently, kneading above his shoulder blade.

"I've heard that." Will bridges into it absently. Hannibal can see the curl of his mouth against the discomfort. He keeps working, feeling the shift under Will's skin.

"Have you done any more of your physio since we last talked about it?"

"I tried," Will mumbles. "It's just... hard to make myself."

"Do you want me to help you?"

Will goes still, clearly thinking. Hannibal wonders briefly if he's overstepped. But Will finally nods. "I think I need... someone to help me."

Hannibal squeezes his hands gently. "All right. I'm happy to do so, and just to spend time with you."

Will glances back at him. "We can spend time together in other capacities. No need to hoard excuses." Hannibal attempts to look guilty, but he's thrilled Will said it. "That reminds me," Will continues, itching his chest absently, "I think I have some light fittings."

"For my bedroom?" Hannibal hums.

"Yeah, you wanted something for the dining room too right? I've got some ideas at least. I found more antique stuff."

"You've been a busy boy."

Will shrugs against his hands. "I don't sleep much sometimes."

Hannibal squeezes again to make him jump. "I can tell."

"You're using your doctor voice again," Will complains.

"Excuse me, it won't happen again."

Will chuckles. "Liar."

"You wound me." He rubs gentle circles on the back of Will's neck with his thumbs. The action elicits a sigh.

I'm s-sure - god that's good."

Hannibal wishes he'd have put Will in front of a mirror for this. He closes his eyes for a moment before concentrating his efforts on Will's wounded shoulder for a moment. Will hisses in outright pain before Hannibal feels something shift, and Will makes a shivery, bitten off sound. "Jesus-"

"I'm sorry," Hannibal says again. "I'll move on."

"It's all right, don't."

Hannibal just lays his palms over the scarred shoulder for a moment and presses. Will puts his own hand over top and gently squeezes. "Will," Hannibal murmurs, "I would very much like to kiss you."

Tipping his head back, Will gives him a crooked little smile. "I'd like that."

Hannibal pulls him to his feet and turns him, hand finding the curve of his cheek. Will is the one who leans in, hands settling warm on Hannibal's waist and their lips brushing. For a long, aching moment that is all it is, just a soft press of their flesh. Then Will steps in closer still and kisses him more deeply.

Hannibal parts his lips, one hand skating up the curve of Will's spine. Will makes a weak noise at the touch of their tongues. The sound of it makes Hannibal's skin prickle. He grips Will gently. He wants to touch him, all his exposed skin, but he's afraid to take what he hasn't earned. Just the heat pouring off him is enough to make his breath skip, and his mouth is hotter still.

Will backs him against the counter, gripping his hips as his kisses turn more demanding, still sweetly careful. He pulls back then, but it’s only to nose along his jaw and suck gently at the soft skin under his ear.

Hannibal tips his cheek and sighs. "Will..."

"Hannibal?" his lips buzz against Hannibal's skin. It makes him shiver.

"It's good," he tells him softly, fingertips brushing his cheek again; nails scratching gently into stubble.

"It is," Will agrees. He noses in again, inhaling deeply, one smoothing down Hannibal's side. "S'okay?"

"Yes, of course." He can feel his body starting to react. Will must be able to, pressed so close. He's nosing under Hannibal's jaw again, sighing slow. Hannibal can smell the heat of him this close; the evidence of his labors. It's more appealing than it has any right to be.

Hannibal kisses his temple, hand finding his hair. Will's nose rests under his ear, and eventually his teeth set against the soft skin there again, gently grazing. Hannibal draws in a slow breath. He can feel the press of Will's tongue, too. He suppresses a groan at the long draw of it down his throat.

Will's hum sounds particularly pleased. He sucks over his pulse point and Hannibal draws his brow; summons his control against the shivers Will's mouth leaves in its wake. He can stand this, but he doesn't want to. Will gently turns his chin with one callused palm to kiss his mouth again eventually. Hannibal relaxes into it. His own hands skate back up to Will's bare, well-muscled shoulders. Touching feels necessary now.

"All right?" Will murmurs.

"Losing myself in it."

That makes Will smile. "Do you do that a lot?"

"In things that move me."

"I move you, huh?" Will squares their hips up, smiling down at the space between them despite his teasing.

"You do, Will Graham." Hannibal urges him closer. He's satisfied when they're flush; when Will kisses him again with a sigh. It's lazy and searching, heavy with the potential to inflame. Hannibal savors the sheer solid heat of Will against him; all his bare skin. His hands clasp gently, fingers flexing.

Will finally pulls back, lipping at his skin gently, stubble scraping. It's so much. Hannibal luxuriates in the deluge of sensation. Will's eyes are shining, a piercing blue. He smiles and steps back, grabs for his shirt, pulling it on carefully.

"I should uh, probably get on."

"If you must," Hannibal nods. Will touches his wrist.

"Remember what I said. You can call anytime. And don't forget about the plants tomorrow."

"All right." Hannibal nods. He stays in the kitchen as Will goes into the dining room to gather his tools. He needs to catch his breath. Eventually, he turns his attention to dinner prep while Will finishes up.

"Hannibal," Will says from the doorway, a short while later, "I'll see you tomorrow."

Hannibal goes to him. "What time shall I expect you?"

"Ten," Will says, "I want to stop by a lighting supply place."

"All right." Hannibal smiles. He's pleased and surprised when Will leans and kisses the corner of his mouth swiftly. He goes just as swiftly, but it's still a sign of some sort of progress. Hannibal listens to the tread of his tires on the gravel outside, and sighs. He is smitten, and they both know it.

*

The next morning, Will arrives promptly, and Hannibal is patiently waiting. He surprises Hannibal with a bakery box. "I thought we could find a spot for breakfast since the weather's so fine," he says, looking almost sheepish on Hannibal's doorstep. "This place was right next to the lighting store," he explains.

Hannibal smiles. "How thoughtful. Let me fix a thermos of coffee for us and we can take that too."

"All right." Will comes inside while he waits. He leans against the doorjamb, watching Hannibal. "You look - you look good."

“Thank you, Will.” Hannibal smiles to himself. He'd dressed more casually in deference to the weather, and in preparation for visiting a greenhouse. Will looks like he's made some small concession to sartorial taste with a neat waistcoat over his dark Henley. "You look very smart, too.”

"Oh - uh - gotta keep up, I guess." He smiles at the floor.

Hannibal chuckles a bit as he pours the coffee into a thermos. What a lovely boy he is. "You're doing admirably. Shall we?"

"Of course." Will holds the door for him on the way out, and Hannibal touches his arm fleetingly as he goes by.

Judging by the new air freshener and the dusty, warm smell of a vacuum cleaner, Will has cleaned out the truck before coming today. It's a nice vehicle; Will has clearly put some money into it. His tools, as well. Hannibal would very much like to visit him at home some day.

"Do you have a place in mind for breakfast?" he asks, as Will fastens his seat belt.

Will hands Hannibal his phone. "The nursery address is pulled up in maps already, is there a park nearby?"

Hannibal scrolls around a bit, and eventually points one out. "Perfect, let's go." Will steers them out of Hannibal's driveway and toward the main road.

It's a bright, crisp day, showing signs of spring. Hannibal looks out of the window for a while before allowing himself to return his attention to Will.

"Have you thought any more about our dinner plans?" he asks politely.

Will looks at him, maybe a little surprised. "With regards to what?"

"You mentioned dinner and a gallery?" Hannibal smiles politely.

"Oh, yeah." Will nods. "Just let me know when's best for you."

"Saturday," Hannibal says impetuously.

Will fails to stifle a smile. "Saturday it is. Any preferences on restaurants?"

"I have a few ideas, but I don't wish to be presumptuous."

"Be presumptuous, a drive-through is still my idea of an evening meal sometimes." Hannibal can't help shuddering. Will laughs at him. "Yeah, that's what I thought. You should pick a restaurant."

"Do you like Japanese cuisine?" Hannibal asks after considering it for a moment.

"Sure." Will nods.

"Then I know a perfect place."

"Great." Will's eyes flick to him for a moment. Hannibal sees his mouth curl. "There's a toy museum downtown I wouldn't mind checking out."

Hannibal doesn't give him the reaction he's clearly waiting for. Little brat, he was clearly looking for the strangest museum he can find. "Sounds charming."

"It might be," Will glances at him.

Hannibal tilts his head, expression reproachful. "I'm interested in many things, Will."

"But puppets?"

"Mostly I like your company."

"See if you still like it when you've seen the breadth of my shitty sense of humor."

Hannibal raises a brow. He thinks he will, actually.

Will shifts a bit in his seat. Eventually, they reach the park and he pulls up in a quiet spot. "Shall we?"

Hannibal nods and leads them to a picnic table. In the balmy morning light, Will looks windswept and lovely. He puts a blanket from the truck bed down on the bench, and Hannibal tries not to think of coats thrown over puddles. He gives him a smile. "Very chivalrous, Will."

"I can be."

Hannibal sits down and decants them both coffees. Will's knee nudges his as he settles beside him. He opens the box. Inside is a beautiful assortment of pastry, far more so than Hannibal had expected. He smiles crooked and fond. Will catches it and blushes.

"I didn't know what you'd like, and everything looked good. I forgot plates too, I'm sorry."

Hannibal smiles and plucks a folded napkin from the side of the box. Paper, but the bakery was clearly making an effort. Hannibal makes a mental note to visit it someday. "This is perfectly serviceable. More of a picnic this way."

Will glances at him, lips curving slightly like he knows the concession Hannibal is making. He leans their shoulders together. Hannibal watches him take a bite of the pastry he hands him and snort at the resulting sugar blizzard. He eyes Hannibal, who's taking a bite of an entirely unoffensive tartlet. "You gave me that one on purpose."

"I would never do such a thing."

"Don't lie, Doctor Lecter," Will says, tone fond. Hannibal reaches out and brushes the powder off his chin gently. "Luckily," Will murmurs, "I am from New Orleans, and a little powdered sugar never hurt me none."

Hannibal beams at the curl of an accent usually suppressed. He's aware in anyone else he'd find it unremarkable. "You hide your accent, usually. Did you find being a police officer with a Southern accent discredited your intelligence?"

"I was a police officer in the South," Will points out, "so no, it wasn't *that* that discredited my intelligence."

"What was it then?"

Will gives him an unimpressed look. "They didn't see me, or even know how to look."

"They didn't deserve to see you," Hannibal murmurs.

Will's expression is both soft and taut. "But I deserved to be seen. Or not seen, in certain ways."

"You did," Hannibal concedes. "It sounds like it took you quite a lot of therapy to reach that conclusion."

Will smiles, eyes flicking up to meet his. "Yeah, I guess it did. You'd know, I'm sure you've provided plenty."

"Does that trouble you?"

"No," Will murmurs. "You're not my doctor."

"And I have no interest in being so."

"Except for the physical therapy thing," Will points out dryly.

"I should hope you don't reward all your physical therapists the same was you did me," Hannibal says, just as dryly.

Will bites his lip attractively. "No, though none of my physical therapists has ever handled me in quite the same way you did either, Doctor."

"Did you enjoy being handled?" Hannibal asks mildly.

Will's cheeks go a bit pink. "Did you?"

Hannibal takes a sip of coffee and smiles. "Yes." He watches Will mirror him, smiling to himself. The coffee and the pastries are both exceptional, but sitting in the sun with Will is more so.

"Tell me where you grew up," Will says, eventually.

"Paris, mostly," Hannibal says.

"In the city?"

"Yes, I was at school there after my aunt and uncle took me in."

"A boarding school," Will guesses.

Hannibal nods. "It was the done thing."

"Are they as bad as everyone says?"

"I didn't find them so."

"Were you a good student?"

"Intelligent, or obedient?"

"I know you're intelligent."

Hannibal smiles to himself. "I was not so obedient, no."

"I think you and I might have teenage delinquent in common." Hannibal is more pleased by that than he can quite express. Especially the fact that Will is making connections. "I think we turned out all right in any case," he jokes.

Hannibal smiles and touches an errant curl. "You certainly did."

"Oh, so did you."

"Flatterer." Hannibal regards him warmly. Will's smile is crooked and easy. Hannibal leans in to kiss him.

He tastes of sugar and warmth, and his hand comes to rest on Hannibal's shoulder for a few seconds as they linger on the contact. Hannibal chooses not to repeat it. This isn't the time; he just couldn't resist. Will sips his coffee and the silence grows companionable rather than heavy with nostalgia: like they're both finding the present more satisfactory than the past.

Eventually, when they've eaten their fill of pastries, Will packs up the box again. "Ready to go?"

"Yes, let's." Hannibal collects the coffee.

They go back to the truck. Will stretches his shoulder before he gets back in the car. Hannibal's urge to tend to him is nearly uncontrollable.

"I'm all right, don't panic," Will teases, fastening his seatbelt.

"Am I so obvious?"

"Not always. I am getting better at the signs, though."

"Feel free to simply ask."

Will grins. "Not much of a game that way."

"Is this a game?"

Will colors. "Only with myself."

"What are the rules?"

Will sighs. "I have this - problem," he mutters. "I've always had it, that I can remember. Shrinks in the past have called it an empathy disorder."

Hannibal nods, curiosity piqued. He ignores the term 'shrink', which he dislikes, because he knows Will is usually more polite.

"I uh - I tend to see things a little too clearly."

"I still fail to see the game," Hannibal replies.

"I guess things about you. I get points if I'm right."

"Isn't the empathy a head start?"

"Of course, but I'm not psychic."

"Of course not."

Will shrugs. "I was always good at figuring people out. Sometimes without knowing why. Sometimes I can't get away from them - I become more like them, I guess." He looks at Hannibal fleetingly. "It's... it's why I'm usually better single, I guess."

"Surely you would mirror your beloved's finer traits as well."

Will laughs softly. "And they'd know it was just a facade. That's the problem."

Hannibal nods in understanding. "So you would benefit from opacity, presumably."

Will nods, attention turning to driving them out of the park. The nursery is only a few streets away.

Inside, Will leads them to the plants they'll need. Hannibal takes over studying the plants for health, setting flourishing specimens aside as Will retrieves a cart.

Will seems quietly amused at his dedication. When he catches Hannibal's eye, he shrugs. "I'm not a plant guy."

"You prefer furrier companions."

"Yes," Will smiles.

"I like dogs," Hannibal muses, "clever creatures. We had horses when I was young."

"That's not the same thing at all, Hannibal."

"They have similar motivations."

Will looks skeptical. "I'll take your word for it, I'm better with smaller creatures."

"What do you mean by that?"

"I know fish, and dogs."

"And people, I'd add," Hannibal says fondly.

"I think you're the expert there."

Hannibal doesn't deny it. He thinks Will prefers honesty to platitudes. He knows Will looks both charming and attractive, in the soft filtered sunlight, hands full of greenery. He must see Hannibal looking, too, because he ducks his head shyly and huffs a bit.

"I'm going to go find some soil for these." He wheels the cart off to another aisle, leaving Hannibal to the herbs.

He smiles to himself and picks up some coriander. Will was right about this place having good selection. He carries a few more pots to find Will when he's finished. Will has the rest, as well as a few bags of potting soil and some plant food. He gives Hannibal a crooked little smile. Hannibal is momentarily pleased at remembering that this is not simply his contractor

helping him pick plants. More than momentarily, really. He's suffused with something between contentment and expectation.

"We good?" Will asks.

Hannibal nods. "Yes, I believe so."

"Great. C'mon." He leads them to the register. Hannibal just watches him. He seems to know the cashier, but he doesn't chat much, just loading things back into the cart as Hannibal pays.

He touches Will's wrist when he's done. Will smiles at him. In the parking lot, he loads the bed of the truck while Hannibal returns the cart. Then he opens the truck door for Hannibal.

"Thank you, Will." They both pause in the opening for a moment. Will puts a hand against the upper lip of the truck door, framing Hannibal against between his body and that of the truck.

"Don't mention it," he murmurs. They both get caught up in staring for a moment. Another car door closes nearby, and Will jolts a bit, looking around. He lingers, then he's disappearing back around to his side of the car.

Hannibal gets in with a barely restrained sigh. He'd thought he was more than happy to give Will time and space, but he'd like more than this. He feels almost guilty for thinking it as soon as Will gets in and fastens his seatbelt. It's obvious he's feeling self-conscious. He can only hope their next date helps.

"Are you well?" he asks, when Will has been driving for a while.

"Hm? Oh, yeah, of course." Will looks over and smiles crookedly. "I'm thinking of places I can take you so I don't have to go home."

"You can simply stay at mine," Hannibal points out. "No work required."

"I know that. I just..." he bites his lip, then shrugs.

"Anywhere, Will. Just drive. I am with you."

Will glances at him, then lets out a slow breath. "Want to come meet the dogs?"

Oh. He wasn't expecting that. "I'd love to."

Will nods once and reverses their direction. "It's uh - it's a bit of a trek."

"I don't mind at all. Tell me more about your house?"

"Just a farmhouse," Will shrugs. He looks a bit sheepish then. "It's... you'll see."

"A work in progress?" Hannibal murmurs.

"You could say that."

"I understand that."

Will laughs. "I mean. You've lived in your house five minutes. I've lived in mine five years."

"And you spend your time fixing everyone else's."

"Like I say, you'll see what I mean."

Hannibal smiles to himself and looks out the window.

Will's farmhouse isn't exactly what he expected, despite all warning. It's small and quaint, yes, but scrupulously neat, at least on the outside. The fields surrounding it are mostly unkempt, tall grasses growing into trees. There's a large barn not far from the house, and a corrugated iron roof over what looks like a wood salvage pile that occupies more footage squared than the house itself.

Will opens Hannibal's door for him again and hesitates for a second. "You might wanna just wait here a moment - they're a little wild sometimes when I've been out."

"As you wish," Hannibal replies. He's not frightened of dogs, but he realizes seven is a full-fledged pack. He watches Will open the door and immediately be mobbed by the river of tails and lolling tongues. He seems resigned to a certain number of kisses, but after a few seconds he snaps his fingers and all seven pour from the porch and into the grass around the house.

They seem to notice Hannibal in twos or threes, which is convenient. He stands still and solemnly offers his hands for sniffing. Eventually he's deemed unremarkable, and Will smiles and beckons him inside.

"You want coffee? Or I have iced tea."

"Iced tea sounds lovely, Will." He's standing in the doorway now, observing Will's space and feeling slightly disoriented. While there is an upper floor, everything seems to be crammed into this one, including a double camp bed and arguably too many arm chairs for one man with only two arms.

"Go ahead and say it," Will says dryly.

"I love what you've done with the place."

Will shakes his head. "You mean when I started refinishing the floors upstairs two years ago and never finished?"

"An impressive level of procrastination."

"I found a couple of the dogs around then. Training happened. Floors didn't."

"Will... you could have called someone in to finish the floors."

He sees Will's shoulders go up. "I don't really like people in my house."

Hannibal watches him, curious. He tilts his head. "Are you sure the floors are the only reason you don't use the upstairs, Will?"

Will bites his lip, retreating into the kitchen. Hannibal waits, giving him his space. A small dog comes and sits at his feet, the stump of its tail wagging excitedly. Bemused, he bends to pet it. Pretty soon there are two more. Then he's surrounded.

"Oh hell," Will says, coming back to the doorway with his overshirt tied around his waist, "you're for it now."

Hannibal smiles. "I've only brought it upon myself." He sees Will tense a bit as he goes to his knees to fuss the dogs in turn.

"Hannibal - you'll get covered-"

Yes, he knows. He's resigned. And it's important to Will - not that he get covered, but that he doesn't mind. "They're just clothes," he tells him, stroking a brindle mix that examines him with rather more baleful eyes than the others.

Will wanders closer and watches. "Winston's shy," he explains, head tilted thoughtfully, "found him at the side of the road."

"Is he the only one you found as such?"

"Couple of them were dropped off here - people see a farm house, figure here's as good a place as any." His accent curls again, possibly annoyance. "Buster was from a friend. They passed away."

Hannibal nods. "Buster is?" Will gestures at the Jack Russell and Hannibal strokes his velvety ears. "I'm sure he's the boss, is he?"

"Napoleon complex. Like me."

Hannibal stands lazily and walks over to him. "Is that so?"

"I keep it more or less in check."

Hannibal looks him over deliberately. "Give me a tour then?"

Will laughs. "Well, if you look to your left, you'll see not only my study and dining area, but also my living room and bedroom."

"Yes, I did notice. What a cunning use of space." Hannibal grins. "And the kitchen?"

"Just three steps back." Will shows him into the kitchen - small but neat and homely with sage and oak decorating, not necessarily Will's taste, Hannibal hazards. "The site of my culinary exploits, such as they are. And a grill out back," he gestures to a glass paned door.

"It's very nice. Is the upstairs entirely empty then?"

"Some storage." Will's still avoiding the subject, he notes. "I can show you the barn if you uh - if you like, it's a workshop really."

"Do you have furniture in progress out there?" Hannibal's interest piques.

"Yeah, a few things. Come take a look."

Pleased, Hannibal allows himself to be led through the grassy yard and into the outbuilding. That's neat and bright too, several pieces in progress set on tarps, some in varying levels of stained and raw wood. There's a lathe mounted on a bench and several turned wood finishes in olive and horse chestnut, shiny smooth.

Hannibal walks slowly around the space, reaching out to touch, and Will hangs back, watching him with his arms folded. He doesn't look nervous, just assessing.

"These are exceptional. I didn't realize how prolific you were, Will."

Will ducks his head. "I have a lot of free time, I guess. Thanks, though." They pause together outside of the big barn doors and Will tucks his hands in his pockets and smiles. "This is nice."

"Having company?"

"Having you here."

It makes Hannibal feel flush with warmth. He can't quite think of the right thing to tell Will how much it means to him, being here, not without scaring him off. "Thank you for the invitation," he says finally.

"It's all right. Do you want to come for a walk-? With - the dogs. They'll settle, then."

Hannibal looks briefly at his shoes - acceptable - then nods.

Will grins knowingly. "I can loan you something, if you want."

"I'm sure I will manage."

"It's dry enough," Will agrees, "I'll avoid the swamp route."

Hannibal laughs. "Kind of you." He watches Will return to the house and whistle. The dogs arrive quickly at heel from all directions. Hannibal is intrigued by this version of Will, gentle and firm. It's another facet that Hannibal finds irresistibly stunning. He's so soft here on his own, with the woods and the fields to guard him. Hannibal realizes all too keenly what a privilege it is to see him this way. It's breathtaking, really.

With another glance around the barn, he follows Will and the dogs. Other than his biweekly swims, Hannibal hasn't made time for much exercise lately. Not that he doesn't do plenty of dashing around. Still, being out in the woods like this is pleasant. He catches up to Will and is pleased when he nudges their shoulders companionably.

Will smiles at him. "Thanks for coming with me."

"I'm delighted to," Hannibal replies.

Will smiles wider and looks down. He strokes Winston's ears as he circles their legs. "Go on, it's all right." He scruffs his chin gently and watches him rejoin the others.

"He's more protective of you than the others," Hannibal observes idly.

"I suppose it's his personality."

"Perhaps." Hannibal nods. He keeps their steps in synch, watching Will, who catches Hannibal's gaze.

"What museum do you really wanna go to when we go out?" he asks.

Hannibal laughs. "Oh, Will, isn't that cheating?"

"I'd call it being considerate. I might not be kidding about the toy museum."

Hannibal regards him silently for a few moments. "The art museum. There's a special exhibition on the Mannerists I've intended to see."

"What are the Mannerists?"

"A group of artists from the very late Renaissance. This exhibition will focus on some lesser-known talents."

"Sounds good. I'll have to brush up."

"I will answer any questions I'm able to, of course."

Will smiles. "I'll try return the favor on other topics."

"Very well."

They bump shoulders again. Will distances himself again to tend to the dogs, throwing sticks and largely fetching them himself. Hannibal watches fondly from the safety of the woodland's edge. When Buster brings him a stick, he regards it for a moment in dismay. When he glances up, Will is watching, grin small and badly disguised. Hannibal feels there's nothing else to do but pick it up and throw it.

Buster goes ricocheting off after it, and Will's laugh is soft and joyful. Hannibal paces closer, smiling back. "And what would you lay at my feet, Napoleon?"

Will straightens minutely, smile softening. "What would you like?"

"Whatever you'd like to give."

A flush spreads across the bridge of Will's nose. Hannibal thinks of peach skin and tart sweetness. "It's not always easy for me to do that," Will confesses, quietly, "I hope that's

okay."

Hannibal nods. "All I could ever want is honesty."

"I'm just - I'm not good at relationships. I want - I want to be but - I'd like to keep it... casual. And that's not - I don't need the door left open for opportunity - I just need it open for. Air." He swallows hard, hands visibly wringing. Hannibal touches the back of one with his fingers.

Will turns his palm up, and their fingers lace. He looks guilty.

Hannibal waits until he looks back up. "Thank you."

"Don't thank me, Jesus," Will looks pained.

"But you were honest."

"I'm rarely dishonest. It's the price of being - the way I am."

"Ah." Hannibal pauses. "And what is your sense of empathy telling you now?"

Will drops his gaze again. "On the surface, that you're disappointed."

"Not enough to stop seeing you," Hannibal tells him.

Will looks away, eyes scanning the horizon in a frantic diversion from whatever he sees in Hannibal's face. "Jesus. This is - what I mean, about being better on my own. Imagine how disappointing I'll be, a few weeks down the line."

"I would like to judge my disappointment, or lack thereof, by my own criteria."

Will sets his mouth into a thin line. He looks sick of himself. "Whatever you say."

Hannibal tilts his head. "Will..."

"Just forget it."

Silence falls. Hannibal looks at the dogs again, calculating his response; weighing his feelings. "Do you want me to be angry with you?"

"Would it be *honest*?" Will snarks softly.

"No. But you'd like a reason to justify your assumption that this will fail."

"Should have known better than to argue with a psychiatrist." Will is suddenly all smiles again. Hannibal relaxes incrementally, waiting. Will sighs and turns back to him, scrubbing a hand through his hair. "I'm sorry, Hannibal."

"All is forgiven. Should we turn back to the house?"

"Sure." Will whistles the dogs and they amble back through the trees. The tension feels like it's been broken. Hannibal isn't sure what brought it about - what Will might have said if he

hadn't suddenly turned like a current. He reaches for him, and their hands brush, and Will twines their fingers obligingly. So that much is acceptable. He can live with that.

Back at the house, Will seems sheepish and remorseful again. He pours them both a drink and clutches his to his chest. Hannibal stands with him in the kitchen and waits for him to come clean about whatever he's turning over in his mind.

"I'm not used to having to work so hard for a conversation," he says finally.

Will smiles at him sadly. "I'm sorry."

"I know, Will. It's all right." He waits again, and then Will sets his glass down and comes to him, standing in front of him with his chin raised, a little defiant. Hannibal raises his brows just slightly.

"You really still want this-? Me?" Will murmurs.

Hannibal reaches out in answer, draws him close, and Will touches the counter behind him, framing him with his arms. He still looks mildly disbelieving. Hannibal chooses to kiss him instead of arguing.

Will shivers, and then relaxes all at once. His arms come up around Hannibal's neck and he gives Hannibal his weight to support, pressing him against the counter. Sighing in relief, Hannibal accepts it with relish. He'd like to imagine that he and Will might find the beginnings of a connection here, with this. He'd like to imagine Will might let him prove himself - prove that they can be good together. In moments like this they feel like they could be very good together indeed. Will is kissing him slow and deep and thorough, the kind of kisses that sets an ache deep in Hannibal's core.

Hannibal spreads his thighs to get him closer. Will makes a tempting noise against his mouth and presses forward with his hips, the feeling of him knocking the breath out of Hannibal for a moment. He makes a soft noise. Will pulls back and laughs, just a soft huff against Hannibal's lips.

"Are you all right?"

"Never better, don't stop," Hannibal says, amused.

Will touches his shoulders, palms sliding down his biceps. He nips at the corner of Hannibal's mouth gently and Hannibal lets him do as he wishes. When Will takes his hips in his hands and arches as he kisses Hannibal's throat, he's glad of it. He hums Will's name. He's been careful to hold back so far, but now he wants to touch him.

His hands seek out Will's dimpled lower back, thumbs skimming underneath his shirt. Will arches again and sighs.

"That feels good," he murmurs.

Hannibal obligingly smooths his hands under his shirt and smiles at the resulting soft noise. "Your skin feels as lovely as it looks."

Will laughs, hiding his face in his shoulder. "Not the first time you've touched it."

"No, but I felt I needed to tell you."

"Well, thank you Doctor."

"You're very welcome." Hannibal leans in to nuzzle his cheek. Will seems trembly and overwhelmed at the contact. Hannibal keeps his touch steady, reluctant to step back now, though willing to do so. Will doesn't seem to want that, though. He's still caging Hannibal against the worktop and Hannibal watches him for a moment.

"Are you still thinking too hard, Will?"

"Usually. Make me stop?"

"How would you like me to do that?"

"Take me to bed," Will says, voice raspy with hesitation.

"Casually," Hannibal confirms.

"Is that all right?"

"Yes," Hannibal nods, leaning in to kiss him, need burning under his skin. At this juncture, he'd accept anything.

Will leans against him, hands finding his hair and disarranging it with his fingers, letting Hannibal bear his weight. Now that he has permission, Hannibal pulls Will's shirt up and off, discarding it. He strokes over the strong lines of his shoulders and chest, gently tracing muscles and scar tissue alike. Will tenses a bit, but he doesn't speak, and when Hannibal ducks his head to kiss his collarbones, he sighs.

"Your mouth is like a dream," he says.

"Have you been thinking about it?"

"Yes," Will says quietly. His fingers creep to Hannibal's sweater, starting to ruck it up with his shirt. Hannibal takes a steadying breath. He straightens to let Will pull it off, and can't quite restrain a smile at the way Will's eyes devour him. "Wow," he mutters, tugging Hannibal back in by his belt.

"I'll take that as a compliment, and return it."

"Trust me, it's a compliment." Will kisses him again. His hands are busy with Hannibal's buckle.

Whiplashed by the turnaround, Hannibal just lets him, shivering when Will strips it out of the loops swiftly and sets it on the counter. "Bed?"

"Three steps away," Will smiles wryly.

"Start counting." Hannibal lets him go, following. Will kisses him again at the foot of the mattress, hand smoothing down his chest, down to map him out with his hand.

"You're gorgeous, Hannibal." He sits down on the bed, starting to undo his flies, eyes flicking up as if for permission.

"Go on," Hannibal murmurs. He's struck by the sight of Will like this. Shedding some of his many layers, as Hannibal has shed his. Literally now, as Will pushes his slacks down around his hips and leans in to scrape his teeth against his lower stomach.

Hannibal grasps his hair and tries to stay still as Will's fingers hook into the waistband of his underwear, tongue skimming the skin he reveals. "You don't... have to," Hannibal breathes.

"I know that." Will catches his eye from under his lashes. "Do you want me to stop?"

"As long as this is -" Hannibal catches his breath at the rasp of teeth, "quid pro quo."

"That suits me just fine," Will says, accent drawling a bit. It's as if he knows how much Hannibal likes it. He thumbs his boxers down and sighs softly at the sight of his cock, heavy from all their kisses and touches already. "Yes," he repeats, "suits me just fine. Do you want me to use a condom?"

“I haven’t been sexually active since my last screening, and the results were clear.”

“Good - and same,” Will sighs. And then he takes him in hand and draws his tongue from Hannibal's balls to the crown of his cock.

Hannibal's fingers tighten in his hair as he tries to stay still. He's not sure what he was expecting - maybe hesitance. It's like Will has flipped a switch, though. He's committed. Enthusiastic. Hannibal secures his hands into his hair against a wave of pleasant vertigo. When Will takes him into his mouth, his hands tighten on Hannibal’s hips, encouraging gently. Hannibal raises his chin and closes his eyes at the stroke of his mouth, wet and soft and relentless.

Will's thumbs circle over his hipbones. With a slow sigh, Hannibal arches forward. He thrusts gently, looking down at his hands in Will's hair. His eyes are closed, lips stretched and hands steadying. He looks beautiful like this, serenely debauched. Hannibal feels fortunate to see it. He gasps his name softly, watching the slide of his mouth.

Will's lashes flick and he hums around him and pulls him in deeper, the bob of his head fast and smooth, the wet noise of his throat loud in the quiet of the house. Louder even than Hannibal's tight breaths.

"Will," he says, clearer now.

Finally Will pulls off. It gives Hannibal an opportunity to grip his hair and kiss him until he moans; to get his bearings again.

"Quid pro quo," Hannibal repeats, settling next to him on the mattress.

Will smiles and shrugs. "Go at it."

Hannibal urges him to lie back, tugging his pants down. Will watches like he's coolly disinterested, but his hands tighten incrementally in the sheets beneath them. Hannibal smiles, letting his eyes caress him. He spreads his hands carefully over Will through his shorts and his thumbs find the creases of his thighs.

When he takes down Will's shorts, the weight of his packer comes with them, secreted somewhere in the fabric. Hannibal is careful when he sets them aside, but his hands soon return to cup Will's hips. The scent of him curls up to Hannibal's nose. He has to look, though, has to take the sight of Will in, narrow hips and dark hair between. Hannibal unconsciously wets his lips at the sight.

"Stunning," he murmurs, leaning down to kiss the join of his thigh; inhale deeply. He follows the kiss with a slow curl of his tongue. He can feel Will watching, and he goes carefully, tracing the shape of him with the tip before he draws his tongue over the swell of his small, swollen cock.

Will makes a soft noise, hips shifting. He's flushed already when Hannibal looks up, glasses gone and eyes astonishingly blue. Hannibal lips him into his mouth and sucks softly. Each shift and sound he receives in return winds him tighter, but he keeps both hands on Will.

"Hannibal-" he breathes it out hard. "Fuck..."

Hannibal glances up again. Will's hands hover over his hair. "You can," Hannibal murmurs against him. He feels the tips of his fingers prickling against his scalp as he resumes his ministrations. Will sighs loudly as Hannibal circles his tongue and teases at his cunt with the tip of his middle finger, asking permission. "Oh fuck-" Will's hips tip, knees hitching, "Hannibal - yes, please-"

Hannibal doesn't wait, slipping in with two, stroking upward in smooth, gentle motions as he sucks. Will's fingers clench in his hair and his voice goes rough and needy on his moans. Intoxicated by the taste of him, by the slick sounds as he strokes into his body, Hannibal moans too.

"That's good-" Will tips his head back. "Oh fuck-"

Hannibal keeps moving, keeps savoring, as Will's hips vibrate under him. He whirls his tongue over the swell of his cock over and over before lapping beneath, where his fingers disappear, chin and nose wet with his efforts and his senses overwhelmed with Will. Before too long he feels the clenching pulse of his orgasm as it starts. He sucks him through it, groaning against a harsh tug downward on his hair. Every pulse feels like it rockets through him. Hannibal only pulls back when Will pushes, breathing hard.

"My god, that was - that was good."

"Good," Hannibal hums.

Panting softly, Will looks down at him for several long seconds, and then beckons him with one coy finger and a smile that makes Hannibal's heart thump in his chest. "Come up here, then."

Hannibal nods and pushes himself up. Will wraps one arm around his neck and kisses him slowly, licking the taste of himself from his mouth as he arches up against Hannibal. Hannibal hisses a little at the pressure on his cock.

Will is slick and rough in all the right ways, his hands spreading down over Hannibal's ass as they move together.

Hannibal gasps and wraps his fingers around his cock.

"On me," Will murmurs, biting at his lower lip.

He doesn't have much of a choice; Will is holding him close with a tight grip. Thankfully, the thought of it is only too appealing; his release striping the tan skin of Will's belly. Will's insistence tells him he's not the only one who finds it so. He's watching the motions of Hannibal's hand now, breathing fast. Then he ducks his head to lick over a nipple; suck the peak gently into his mouth while Hannibal grits his teeth. He bites back a groan and feels his hips jerk.

"Like that? C'mon, give it to me," Will murmurs, low and dirty before he resumes the steady flick of his tongue.

"Will -" Hannibal's breath catches, cock pulsing in his hand. He hears Will groan against his skin as he comes hot and messy between their bodies, breathing harsh and fast. "Oh, Will," he breathes.

"Gorgeous," Will mutters, streaking his fingers through the mess, bringing two up and licking them clean.

Hannibal moans softly and Will offers them to him, too. His eyes are heavy lidded with satisfaction as Hannibal sucks him clean. His fingers slip seamlessly into his hair, pulling him down into a hungry kiss.

"Thank you."

Hannibal feels just as hungry; stopping up Will's voice with more kisses. They stay pressed together like that for endless minutes, lost in the taste of one another. Finally, Will rubs his cheek against Hannibal's and relaxes.

"Ought to have you over more often."

Hannibal smiles and strokes his hair. "As often as you like."

Will hums. "I'll make you dinner next time." He seems content to stretch out naked underneath him; slot his thigh between Hannibal's and close his eyes. "C'n you stay a while longer?"

"I can," Hannibal murmurs. "I will."

Despite everything, he feels completely content; made right in some way, tangled up with Will with the sun making patterns on the walls over the bed. Will pulls up the sheets lazily and trails his fingers down Hannibal's ribs.

"You're a beautiful man," Will tells him.

Hannibal puts his hand on his chest and kisses him again deeply. "So are you, Will. The most exquisite person I've seen."

He's more than that of course, but this he seems less likely to shy away from. He gives Hannibal that small, sad smile again, and closes his eyes.

"Tell me something about you."

"What curiosity can I satisfy?"

"I don't know if we'll have chance to cover all of them. I just want to know the feeling of you. What's your favorite book? Musician? What do you like to draw?"

"I collect early medical texts," Hannibal tells him. "I often draw classical scenes, or figures in the style of Leonardo."

"I'd like to see them. I never got a chance to when we talked about it."

"Tomorrow. I will get out my sketchbooks for you, I promise."

Will turns their noses together and smiles. "Tomorrow. Is that date night?"

"Tomorrow," Hannibal repeats.

Will gives him another sleepy little grin. Maybe less sleepy than - satisfied. It's charming either way, and Hannibal hates to think of leaving.

Will gets up after a few minutes, to use the bathroom and to retrieve their drinks. Watching him return with his shorts low on his hips and his hair disheveled, Hannibal thinks he could bear 'casual' for all the awful intimacy it affords them. For his part, Will doesn't seem to mind Hannibal's gaze. He slumps back into bed beside him and stretches out, chuckling a bit when Buster jumps up on the bed and sits hopefully near his ankle.

"They're not usually allowed to come up here."

"So strict, Will." Hannibal smiles.

"When there's seven of them, it's a necessary evil." Will holds a hand out, and Buster comes, the stump of his tail excitedly wiggling. He settles himself unconcernedly into the space between their bodies.

Amused, Hannibal strokes him, looking at Will. "Looks like it's a day for breaking rules."

Will shrugs, stifling a smile. "Has to be some day, I suppose."

"Fortunate for me that it's today then, I think."

"Is it?" Will looks over at him, eyes going warm.

Hannibal nods, luxuriating in the unfamiliar flood of warmth in his chest. Will leans in and kisses him, ending with a lazy nip. "Fortunate for both of us." Hannibal steals another kiss, keeping it light but winding a hand through Will's curls to keep him close. Will smiles against his mouth.

"Need help with your planter?"

"Yes," Hannibal admits.

"Boy, this really is your lucky day," Will murmurs.

"You are feeling... inclined to indulgence?" Hannibal touches his chest lazily.

"I think I am," Will muses.

"Should we drive back to Maryland, then?" Hannibal asks lightly. "I'm happy to provide dinner as well."

"Dinner too? Stop, you're spoiling me." His tone is utterly deadpan, but the bridge of his nose is pink.

"It's either that or you keep me here, I suppose I can't escape."

"I'm not a serial killer, Hannibal," Will teases.

"Another thing we have in common."

Hannibal gently pinches his side. "Let's feed your dogs and go back to mine," he hums.

"All right." Will hums and stretches. He shoos Buster off the bed and gets up, starting to pull on his jeans.

Watching him dress is nearly as much of a pleasure as undressing him was. Hannibal bites his lip as he slips back into his shirt. He tries not to indulge himself any further by imagining him in a suit. He senses that it's a bit much to expect.

Will goes to feed the dogs while Hannibal cleans up and dresses himself. When they're both ready, they meet at the truck, Will coaxing the last furry tail into his house and locking up. He opens Hannibal's door for him before getting in and setting off.

They talk idly on the drive. Will talks for a surprisingly long time about the dogs, which Hannibal eventually recognizes as a sign of nervousness: a safe topic. Hannibal politely replies. He can see his self-doubt creeping in. Eventually, he clears his throat.

"Why do you collect dogs, Will?"

"They don't judge me," Will mutters.

"And you need to be surrounded by that? Unconditional acceptance?"

"Who doesn't?"

"Most people look for it in other humans."

"How has that gone for you, Hannibal? It hasn't gone so well for me."

"I am unconventional in that I have never actually wanted it before," Hannibal admits mildly.

"No?" Will lifts a brow.

Hannibal pauses. "Actually, that's not quite true. I suppose it would be more accurate to say I did not find it in the

only person I wanted it from, and so I discarded the notion."

"Who was it?" Will asks.

"Just a woman, when I was a young man. It seems insignificant now." He gives Will a small smile. "Who refused you unconditional acceptance, Will?"

Will snorts. "Who hasn't?" He winds down his window, probably more a diversion than anything else. "Maybe I have a dog for every person who didn't accept me. Are you trying to make me open up? It's an interesting tactic."

Hannibal smiles down at his hands. "Perhaps I was just curious."

"You're never just anything," Will says dryly.

"No, but I think you like that about me."

Will stares out of the windscreen and says, somewhat defensively, "So what if I do?"

"So... you do. No criticism meant, certainly."

"I've spent most of my life avoiding being asked questions. It's a little weird for me to not hate you for asking them."

"It's all right for things to feel weird. As long as you want them to be the way they are."

Will glances at him. They're nearing Hannibal's home now, and the afternoon is still hazy with brilliant, rare sun. Will looks like a stained-glass angel when the light hits him. "I'll bear that in mind."

His face looks so solemn. Hannibal wishes he knew better how to coax out his rare smiles.

At the house, Will lays drop cloths and sets about lining and filling the herb planters in the dining room with soil.

He's all business again, like the morning and the afternoon were some sweet bubble of unreality. He's also endearingly against Hannibal getting dirtied in any way, which he wasn't in Wolf Trap. Hannibal finds himself relegated to mixing the plant food, which he finds mildly humorous. He is permitted to direct where he'd like his plants to go, at least.

While Will cleans up and touches up a few spots of paint, he snips a few sprigs of coriander and thyme to use for dinner and excuses himself to the kitchen. He's putting together a salad when Will slides his arm around his middle a while later, beard scruffing against Hannibal's shirt when he kisses his shoulder. His contractor has left the building, apparently.

He touches Will's forearm lightly. "Hungry?"

"Starving." His hand rests low on Hannibal's belly, tone ambiguous. It's a good job Hannibal finds his rapid cycles entertaining.

"Then your timing is impeccable. Would you like to eat in the dining room?" He feels Will's head shake against his shoulder.

"Not until it's finished."

"In here, then. Let me set us some places."

He keeps his lips from quirking at Will's fidgeting. Perhaps his tone wasn't meant to be so ambiguous after all.

He helps Hannibal set places, and hits all the right cues - as always - that a polite dinner guest should. Hannibal wonders what he'd be like if he didn't so continuously study his manual on the matter.

Hannibal pours them both a glass of white wine and serves their meals with a small flourish. "Thank you," Will says softly, taking a sip.

It's a quiet dinner. Hannibal mostly enjoys his own salad and watches Will eat.

"I had a good day with you," Will murmurs eventually, "feels a little bit like someone else's life, actually."

"It was very much yours," Hannibal replies. But he doesn't push.

Will gives him a smile. "Well. Thanks in any case. I liked it."

"It was my pleasure."

Will nods, pushing the remnants of his dinner around a bit with his fork. Hannibal keeps graciously silent. He sets his own cutlery down, and waits. After a few seconds, Will's pale eyes find his.

"I ought to go."

"Very well, Will." He holds out a hand to stop him from stacking the plates. "I will do it. Please."

"Let me at least help you clear the table."

Hannibal agrees reluctantly. Between them, it's sorted in minutes. Will drains his wine glass before he hands it over to Hannibal, flashing him a grin - a real one.

"No more of that if I'm driving home."

Hannibal returns his smile, somewhat more sedately. He doesn't tell him he could stay; knows he couldn't with the dogs. He just reaches out and strokes his hair out of his eyes and then goes back to running water to let the dishes soak.

"Will you be working tomorrow?"

"I should put in a few hours at the workshop. Got a dresser I'm finishing up for next week."

Hannibal nods. "Of course. I will see you in the late afternoon?"

"I'll be wrapped up by one, so whatever time after works for me. Shall I come pick you up?"

"If you like. We could take my car instead."

"Sure, I can leave mine here." They're in the hall now, Will shrugging his tragically rumpled utility jacket on.

Hannibal leans against the wall and waits. He's rewarded by Will's knowing grin; a hand on the wall by his shoulder as he leans in. He gets a kiss, slow and thorough with the press of Will's body against his.

"Always think you look so good in that apron," Will mutters, giving Hannibal's collar a teasing little pop when he pulls away. "I'll see you tomorrow."

"Good night," Hannibal murmurs. He kisses Will one more time, and then lets him out of the door, watching his shoulders as he disappears down the drive. It takes him a few moments to register the heat in his face.

He smooths his hands over his apron, biting his lip. He's not sure how Will flits so effortlessly between 'social recluse' and 'outrageous flirt', but it's giving him unfamiliar feelings. Less fond, perhaps, and more overcome. He goes to the kitchen to wash up with a sigh.

Chapter 4

Will is working on vacuuming the sawdust out of the drawers of the completed dresser when he hears a loud knocking at the barn door. Very loud, or he wouldn't have heard it. He jumps, but there's no barking, so the dogs mustn't be worried. He goes to the barn door and opens it up, pushing up his visor.

He sees his friend Beverly outside the door, dogs milling around her. "I had to come say hi to my favorite Grahams," she smiles.

"Hi, Bev!" He's surprised, but not displeased. "What're you doing in Wolf Trap?"

"I had an interview in Richmond this morning, and it's been weeks since we've even texted. Where have you been hiding?"

"Oh, you know. Mostly here. I got a gut job on a kitchen fit and it's had me a little wrapped up. Want to come in for some coffee?"

"Sure," she says. "As long as I'm not keeping you from anything."

He checks the time. He's finished up sooner than he thought for today, he'll still need to polish up tomorrow but that's all right. "I'm heading out about two, but I've got time for coffee."

"Ooh, big Saturday plans?"

"I - I have a date," Will says, busying himself with coffee to keep from watching for her reaction. When they were on the force together, she'd been like a sister.

"Will Graham," she says, voice filled with delight.

He chuckles a bit despite himself. "Don't say it like that. He's - he was a client, actually, we've been. I don't know. It's casual."

"So what are you doing on your totally casual, still-a-date?"

"We are going to an art gallery to see an exhibition on the Mannerists, and then getting Japanese food."

"Fancy," she grins, accepting a cup of coffee once he's finished with the French press. Hannibal's bad influence.

"He's a fancy guy."

Bev kicks his ankle. "You dog. Tell me all about him. You said he's a client?"

Face burning, Will takes off his dusty workshop boiler and sits down, petting a few errant noses that come in to investigate potential for food. "Yeah. He wanted a kitchen. I built him

one. We - we got along."

"Still getting along, I guess."

"Yeah, we get along just fine. What about you, still with whatshername?"

"Clarice," Bev says with a sigh. "You can't pretend to be mad at her forever just because she convinced me to apply to the FBI."

"I'm not mad at her about anything, you're an adult."

"I'm just saying." Bev shrugs. "The FBI isn't the enemy."

"Unless you're different," Will mutters.

She squeezes his wrist and smiles. "You're better than any of them."

"That's not what they said. And you didn't answer my question - are you guys still together?"

"No," Bev says patiently. Will tilts his head. Bev sighs. "She likes dudes now or something."

"It's called bisexual, and plenty of us are," Will snarks back.

"Yeah well, it's getting kind of lonely here on Lesbian Island," Beverly sips her coffee and strokes a nearby dog.

Will rolls his eyes. "You sound like Alana now." Not that he's sure he could categorize her sexual preferences, either. He thinks she finds the distinction of 'gay' easier to explain these days.

"Isn't she that shrink you dated?"

"Yes," Will says patiently. Beverly feels approximately the same way about shrinks as he does; she'll die when she finds out about Hannibal.

"What about your new boyfriend?"

"I think he might just date whoever he likes the look of. And he's not my boyfriend."

Bev laughs. "You're still going with that, huh? How many people is this now who've failed to get the stamp of approval?"

"It's not a stamp of approval. The life expectancy of my relationships doesn't usually warrant giving them the kiss of death. It's overkill."

"That was a big old murder metaphor," Bev points out. "Just saying."

"Isn't everything in my life?"

"Jesus, Will."

"What?" he sighs.

"You're just... I mean, don't get me wrong, I miss the drama, but wow. You're so dramatic."

"You wound me," he mutters, playing up to it, "a thousand cuts, each word."

"Oh, please, you love me."

"I am happy to see you. Maybe we can do pizza or something one night. A movie."

"Any time, my friend. Any time." She sips her coffee and looks at it thoughtfully. "This isn't as awful as it usually is."

"I've learned a few things from Hannibal," Will says casually. "One being that my coffee was terrible before."

Bev's face does something weird, and then she laughs. "He's called *Hannibal*?"

"He's European," Will mutters.

"Well. That's interesting."

"Uh. Why?"

"I guess I'm just surprised." She shrugs. "Do you like him?"

Will furrows his brow at her. "Um. Yes."

"Okay, let me rephrase because you're useless: do you think this one will last longer than any of the others? Estimated time of death?"

Will shrugs. "This is literally our first real date, so...I don't know. How long until I flake out?"

"Are you asking me? Is he cool with - y'know, everything?"

Will blushes. "Seemed like it the other day."

Beverly laughs, unflappable as ever. "Already did a road test, huh? Not like you."

"He's irresistible," Will mutters. That does surprise her. He can see it in her face.

"That's the cutest thing I've ever heard you say, Graham."

Will leans back in his chair and sighs. "Yeah. I guess I do like him. I mean - he's the first person I've wanted to date in a long time anyway. Which reminds me," he looks at his watch, "I should get ready. Tell me what to wear."

"Oh my god, I love this, I'm so glad I came over." She goes over to the closet immediately.

He can't help but laugh, stripping off his shirt and going to take a shower. When he comes back, there's a few options Beverly has deemed acceptable hung up around the room.

She ogles him good-naturedly when he comes in. "Damn, Will, you're jacked. Is it all the power tools?"

"I build things for a living, Bev."

"Damn right. Well, let's see these outfits, pal."

He vetoes a couple right off the bat, but indulges her by at least trying on a few different shirt options. "I don't know if I like those pants," he sighs.

"So change 'em. I like the black ones better anyway."

"Cause they're twice as tight," Will grumbles.

"Yes, and I think your new boyfriend will thank me for that."

"Not -"

"My boyfriend," she finishes with him in unison. "Blah blah blah. Put on the black pants, show me the navy shirt."

Will rolls his eyes and changes. Bev folds her arms thoughtfully.

"Maybe the green would be better..."

"Bev..."

"No, the blue makes your eyes pop. Gonna shave?"

"No." He rolls his shoulders.

"Just checking. You look good. Wear nice shoes," she adds. "If he's European he probably has nice shoes."

"I don't even have any nice shoes."

Bev rolls her eyes. "Decent shoes? Boots?"

"I could possibly stretch to boots."

"Shame you don't have time a for a haircut."

"Nothing is wrong with my hair," Will retorts.

"There's just a lot of it. Kind of goes with your whole lonely forest man vibe I guess."

"Wow," Will says. "Really, Bev?"

"The material writes itself, I'm just calling it how I see it."

"You always do."

She tilts her head. "I just want you to be happy. Sometimes I think you hold yourself back on purpose, that's all."

"I know I do," Will replies.

"Well - you shouldn't." She frowns. "That's fucked up."

"No, it's learning from experience."

"They can't all be the same. Otherwise you wouldn't try again. This guy must have something about him that makes it seem worth it."

Will licks his lips. "He has a lot of something."

"And what's that?"

Will shrugs. "He's challenging."

"Ah, so you have something in common."

"More than I thought at first."

Bev studies him for a second, then nods. "Well that's good."

Will can sense her biting her tongue. He gives her a look, and relents. "He's just. Interesting. I don't know. I like being with him."

"And you're gonna look hot tonight," she adds, grinning.

"If I shave my beard and get a haircut you mean."

"Even without that," she sighs grudgingly. When he narrows his eyes at her, she sticks out her tongue. "I had to try."

"Yeah, yeah. Look - will I do? I should probably think of getting going. I wanted to-" he pauses, thinking. "Is it weird to take flowers for a guy-? I guess it is. What's an alternative?"

"Does he like flowers? It's not weird if it's something he likes."

Will thinks of plants. Is it too many plants? Why does he care? Because Hannibal would, he knows. He thinks hard about it

"I actually think he'd like flowers plenty."

"Get him flowers, man." Bev nudges him with her boot and stands up. "I'll get out of your hair."

"Thanks for coming by, Bev," Will murmurs. He goes to the door with her, watching her fondly as she bids each of the dogs goodbye. Then she hugs him too.

He's surprised; a little uncomfortable. It's nice though. It's nice to know she cares about him. They haven't talked much lately.

They separate awkwardly, and she laughs at the expression on his face before letting herself out. "See you later, Will."

Will stares at himself in the bathroom mirror after she drives off. Maybe she was right about the haircut. He's getting a little unruly. He checks the clock. He has just enough time to stop in town if he leaves now.

"Shit," he mutters, grabbing his keys and a moderately less dog-hair covered jacket from his closet as he goes.

There's a florist down the street from the barber shop. That does make him run late; but only moderately. When he gets to Hannibal's, he's feeling self-conscious about the effort he's gone to. He knocks on the door, brushes down his jacket, and tries to relax.

When Hannibal opens the door, he smiles wide enough to crinkle the corners of his eyes. He's silent for long enough that Will feels thoroughly looked-over - and still somehow underdressed - before he hums approvingly.

"Come on in, Will."

Will hands him the flowers as he steps inside. "For you."

"*Vanda coerulea*," Hannibal says, sounding pleased, "an unusual choice. They're beautiful."

"I stood there forever looking. I don't like cut flowers," Will says, blushing. "This you can keep."

"Such a vibrant color." Hannibal looks at the dappled crimson petals, expression turning fond. "A lot of personality, orchids. They demand delicate treatment - but not too delicate."

"A steady hand?" Will murmurs, looking at the floor.

"And plenty of space." Hannibal gestures, and Will follows him into the kitchen, where Hannibal places the orchid pride of place on the marble counter. "It looks well in here." Hannibal eyes him fondly. "As do you."

He offers a hand, and Will takes it with a begrudging smile. He lets Hannibal draw him close, up against his broad chest. He looks amazing, a slim tailored suit like he typically wears to go to the university. Will touches his tie, touching his lower lip with his tongue at the feel of the silk.

"D'you always dress like you're going to a charity ball?"

"I enjoy good tailoring," Hannibal replies.

"I enjoy it on you."

A slight smile at that. Hannibal's fingers brush through his hair, just where it's shaped behind his ear. Will can't help but like the way he studies him.

"I fear you are distracting me somewhat from my desire to go out."

"That would be a waste of this thirty-dollar haircut, so that's out, sorry." Will smiles. "But... maybe we could have a drink here, after dinner."

"I have just the thing," Hannibal murmurs. "Should we take the Bentley, then?"

Will's belly does a funny little turn at the thought of getting in Hannibal's sleek car. "We can take the truck if you'd rather," he teases.

Hannibal's smile is knowing. "Perhaps not tonight."

"Well, then. I'm ready whenever you are."

Hannibal keeps a hand on his arm and draws him out to the car. Will can't quite school his expression of admiration at the sight of the car. Hannibal is definitely smirking. It's such a good look on him that Will debates sliding over the gear box to kiss it off his mouth. He refrains. But he lets it show on his face.

Hannibal holds his gaze briefly, the tension growing teeth. When he starts the engine and puts the car into drive, the growl is entirely too appropriate.

Will distracts himself with admiration of the car. The drive is smooth and quiet, Hannibal a sleek counterpart behind the wheel. They talk quietly, inconsequential things, but Will doesn't feel forced to reply.

When they’re parked close to the gallery, they walk the rest of the way with their hands brushing every now and then. Inside, it's moderately crowded, but not so much as to make Will instantly twitchy. He sticks close by Hannibal even so, letting his hand skim his lower back as they meander through the introductory exhibits.

Hannibal mostly lets him read the item cards, though he takes issue with a few of them and murmurs his own

interpretations to Will.

"Don't let me read anymore," Will murmurs, after the third or so incident. "Just tell me about your favorite ones."

"If you wish," Hannibal looks pleased.

Will follows him through the yawning halls, comforted by the echoes. Comforted by Hannibal's solid presence at his elbow. He lets himself lean into him when they stop at the next painting.

Hannibal's cheek rests gently against his temple for a moment. "This is Raphael's 'Sistine Madonna', one of my favorite paintings," he murmurs, voice barely audible outside of their

proximity. "The Madonna and Christ gaze out of the painting as if aware of their fate; the great journey they are about to embark upon. The historian Sergei Stam called her expression one of 'openness and credulity, hot love and tenderness'. She knows all of man's folly, and the certainty of pain, and yet she offers her son to it all."

"Why does she? God's will?"

"It was the purpose of his birth. He bore our sins on his back."

"Wonder how he felt about that. Must have been like walking on glass."

"I'm not sure anyone ever asked him."

"That's because everyone knew what he'd do, given the choice."

Will bites his lip and looks away from the painting. He jumps a bit when Hannibal touches his waist under his jacket.

"You have a remarkable mind, Will."

Will's eyes fly up to meet Hannibal's. "Heard that before."

"I can't say I'm surprised."

"Tell me more about this painting."

Hannibal goes on to tell him more about Raphael and the use of light sources, but Will's mind is wandering.

"What about the cherubs?" He murmurs.

"Ah, yes. The cherubs." He gives Will a smile and touches his hair again. "Resigned to ineffability. Ponderous of the future. They are presented as the epitome of innocence - winged babes flanked by saints - and yet they seem indifferent to the chaos of divinity."

"I think you'd have to be an innocent to be indifferent to that."

"Or perhaps thoroughly lacking."

"Jaded?"

"Resigned. Lacking the capacity for surprise, now. I have always believed that to be God's attitude to his creations. Endlessly loving, and unmoved by their plight."

"That sounds like a difficult thing to reconcile."

"I imagine it's terribly boring, as well." He gives Will an almost playful crook of his mouth. "A choose-your-own-ending you've done a thousand times before."

"Such a heathen," Will chuckles.

"On the contrary. I'm a great admirer of God. He's made himself unaccountable for his actions."

"Like an absentee father," Will mutters. It comes out a bit too raw.

Hannibal says nothing. They look at the painting again together. Will doesn't think he's being dismissed, and he's grateful for the quiet.

"Let's look at some more," Will says finally. They drift amongst the frames and sculptures, touching more often than not. Will feels suffused with serenity; the mournful expressions of angels amongst crimson flashes of silk and blood.

When Hannibal speaks, he's quiet. "You look at home here."

"How so? You do, of course."

"You simply have a Renaissance face."

"That's... stunningly flattering, really. I didn't expect that."

Hannibal's smile is small and pleased, eyes bright. Will slips his hand into Hannibal's and squeezes. He wants to kiss him surrounded by art, but fear holds him back. Hannibal looks down at him, though, and the same thing is in his face.

They move on eventually, talking quietly and admiring the art. Will has never been a culture vulture - though he wouldn't say he shied away from it - and he finds a certain peace in the simplicity of it. Hannibal is making it simple.

When they've looked their fill, he walks them to the restaurant nearby, and they're seated under an elegant and ostentatious display of kimonos and silk paintings that put Will in mind of Hannibal's bedroom.

He's not sure if Hannibal is devious enough to plan that. It amuses him that he might be. Will's finding he doesn't mind - on either count.

"It's beautiful in here," he murmurs, amused by the arrival of his slightly less aesthetically pleasing beer.

"It is, I have always admired it."

"You come a lot?"

"Fairly often. My colleagues know it is a favorite, and we make the occasional trip."

"You'll have to tell me what's good."

"If you like." Hannibal opens a menu, though Will wonders if he needs it. He sips his beer while he scans his own.

"All of the fish meals sound good."

"You're partial?"

Will nods. "Especially at a place like this. I can't cook like this." He glances at Hannibal and smiles. "Maybe you can though."

Hannibal smirks faintly. "I spend a lot of time practicing."

"This is me, shocked."

"You fish, I cook."

Will smiles. "Seems a fair deal to me."

"Oh yes, you'll bring me something next time?"

"Yes, I'm running out of freezer space anyway."

Hannibal smiles. "Happy to be of service, in that case."

His smile as he says is just the innocent side of dirty. Will blushes anyway. He hides his face in his glass and is saved by the waiter coming to take their order.

Dinner is easier than he thought it would be - no awkward silence, no reaching for threads of conversation, just Hannibal looking more delectable the more he relaxes. It's really only noticeable for how subtly and slowly it happens. Before he was playing at relaxed - now he's the real deal. It just makes Will want him more and more.

After their meal is finished, he stretches out and sighs, pleasantly full, just-buzzed on his beer. "God, I don't think I'll need to eat for a month."

"I hope not," Hannibal replies, eyes glinting a bit. "I would miss feeding you."

That makes Will chuckle a little. "Oh, well in that case..."

"So glad you agree." Hannibal folds his napkin neatly. "In fact, I was hoping to tempt you with dessert when we get back."

"I think I'm tempted," Will murmurs.

"I can also offer whiskey."

"I was already tempted, no need for overkill," Will jokes.

Hannibal nods. "Very well." He gestures for the bill with a smile.

"Let me," Will protests.

"Not after your recent invoices. Don't think I haven't noticed you skimming the hours."

"I refuse to charge you for time you spend feeding me," Will scolds him.

"And I refuse to let you get away with discounting your rates without recompense. Let me buy dinner."

Will scowls at him for a moment. "Next one is mine."

"Very well. I believe you've promised to cook for me, too."

"Yes," Will nods. "Though honestly, you might live to regret it."

"I doubt that, Will."

"Yeah, we'll see."

When the bill is paid, Hannibal helps Will back into his coat like a perfect gentleman and they walk back to the car with the same careful proximity they always seem to have with one another. Hannibal drives them home with one hand occasionally drifting to Will's knee at stoplights. It feels better than anything Will can remember.

He's hoping to be touched again when they get there.

Hannibal doesn't disappoint him. The house is dark and still, and Will feels like he's seeing it in a different way as they move through to the dimly lit kitchen once their coats are hung. The touches of crimson in the decor gleam like jewels. So do Hannibal's eyes when he turns and smiles.

"Would you like a drink, Will?"

"I'll take that whiskey, yeah. Thank you."

Hannibal nods, going to retrieve a decanter and two tumblers. Will leans on the counter, looking around with pleasure. When Hannibal brings him his drink back, he's loosened his tie a little. It's too much, and Will can't fight the compulsion to reach for it.

Hannibal stands still and lets him. Will takes a steadying breath as he undoes the silk and draws it from around his neck. He rolls it carefully and sets it aside, inspecting Hannibal's collar with its single unfastened button. Not enough. He unfastens his waistcoat carefully.

The fabric of his shirt underneath is warm when Will runs his palms over it. He flattens his palms against his ribs and Hannibal's breath hitches just barely. He seems affected by the simple touch. He sets their drinks down on the counter and immediately touches Will's waist. He knows from the instant he does it that he's been waiting, too.

"You don't really want a drink, do you," Will murmurs.

Hannibal wets his lips. "I did before you started undressing me."

"Can I finish?"

"You can do whatever you like."

"God. Open that right up, why don't you."

Hannibal kisses him then, possibly to shut him up. Will clutches him, unable to stifle a groan when Hannibal lifts him onto the counter in a single, shocking display of effortless strength.

"Hannibal!" Will protests.

"Don't say anything about the marble."

"I wasn't going to, until now!"

"What were you going to say?"

"I don't - you lifted me right up, and -"

"Did you like it-?"

"Maybe," Will mutters. He wraps his arms tight around Hannibal's neck and kisses him hard to stop himself from overthinking it.

Hannibal spears a hand through his hair and kisses back in answer. Will feels flush with pleasure at the contact, like a circuit has been closed. He squeezes Hannibal's hips between his knees. It startles a groan out of him when Hannibal hitches him closer by his thighs. He tugs at fabric until he can run a hand up the back of Will's shirt.

"Take it off," Will rumbles, arching into his hands.

Hannibal's fingers are absurdly quick on the buttons. It makes Will laugh a bit, fondly.

"Just waiting for permission, Hannibal?"

"You know I have. You make me want the most awful things."

"How awful?" He's mesmerized by this Hannibal, greedy and uncouth. Poised even so.

"Just awful enough."

Will laughs. "Take this off. And tell me more."

Stripping it off his shoulders, Hannibal hovers over his skin, leaning in to mouth at the swell of his trapezius as he speaks. "I haven't stopped thinking about how you taste. It's been plaguing me all night."

"Is that awful? I've had a similar thought or two."

"It's not all I've thought about."

"Well," Will shakes his arms free and touches Hannibal's cheek, "then tell me more." He lets Hannibal bow to kiss his chest; his neck. His fringe falls over his face and Will strokes it back.

"Can't stop thinking about your skin," Hannibal murmurs. He touches the V of his hips. "Or this."

Will's breath hitches. Good. He can't hold back a little vocalization when Hannibal bends to bite at the ridge of his hip.

"I want you," Hannibal murmurs against the fabric of his trousers, mouth skipping up to his ribs.

"How do you want me, Doctor?"

"I'll have you here if I must. Will you agree to come upstairs?"

"Yes - yeah, I want to see you stretched on that ridiculous goddamn bed."

"I want - yes," Hannibal breathes, cheeks faintly pink.

Will wraps his legs around his waist and draws him up for a heady, long kiss. Hannibal spears both hands through his hair and holds him close. Will can feel that hungry, demanding creature in him, the one that rails against his self-imposed withholding. It's an almost physical pain, only remedied by kissing Hannibal harder, deeper, taking his fill before he has to give it up again. He's needy, gluttonous.

Hannibal grabs the back of his thighs and pulls, and Will lets him lift him off the counter, keeping a tight hold.

When he realizes Hannibal intends to carry him upstairs, he blushes brick red.

"As much as I appreciate your machismo, I'd much rather we didn't die on the stairs."

"Ye of little faith."

"Hannibal - Jesus-" Will's ears are burning as Hannibal climbs the stairs. He had no idea Hannibal was so strong. Nor that he was so unrestrained as to demonstrate it. It thrills him. Even more so when Hannibal bears him down on the bed and starts to strip him unceremoniously out of his shoes, socks and jeans. Will licks his lips helplessly, growling, "Now you."

Hannibal shrugs out of his clothes and squares up to Will's scrutiny, all compact muscle and effortless, primal masculinity in his stance.

"God, yes," Will breathes. "Come here."

Hannibal does, crawling onto the bed beside him and letting Will roll on top with a sigh. Hannibal's hand slides down to cup him through his underwear, humming softly. "You're wet for me," he whispers.

"And hard for you," Will assures.

"I feel it. So am I."

"Oh, I know that." Will rolls his hips down slowly, sighing. Hannibal's hands settle squarely over his ass, squeezing. "You like that?" Will grins a bit, touching the headboard and rolling down against the hard line of Hannibal's cock.

"God. Yes."

"Me too. This is promising."

He lets his fingers trail down to Hannibal's waistband, lifting away from his belly with the strain of his cock. Hannibal lifts himself up off the mattress, mouth seeking out Will's chest again. Will cups his head, sighing at the ceiling.

"You feel perfect."

Hannibal's tongue skims his nipples, every touch reverent. Will’s hands explore Hannibal's face in turn, his eyes bright in the dark. Will skims his thumbs under the cut of his cheeks and sighs.

"Will you fuck me-?"

"I'd be - honored," Hannibal breathes.

That makes Will laugh a bit. "Honored, huh?" He strokes Hannibal's hair. "So polite."

"Every situation benefits from good manners."

"You're lucky I agree."

"I am certainly feeling fortunate."

"Would you like to feel something else?"

Hannibal actually laughs, a faint huff of breath. "Tell me what you want, Will."

"I want you inside me."

Hannibal nods. “Anything," he adds. "Just tell me."

Nodding, Will just shifts on his lap. Hannibal touches at the band of his shorts, tugging gently. Will shimmies out of them, letting Hannibal urge him higher up his chest. He handles him smoothly into position before lifting his chin to suck him gently into his mouth. Will grabs at his hair with a low gasp of approval. Hannibal groans softly against him.

"You like sucking my cock?" Will murmurs, running his hands through his hair slowly. Hannibal nods silently, tongue working. It sends a harsh shudder of pleasure through Will, senses occupied by him. "You look so good..."

His pale lashes fan against tanned cheeks, fluttering up just slightly at Will's voice. It's pure pleasure. Will sighs and strokes through his hair; rocks his hips and groans at the soft, wet suck sounds Hannibal makes. He's so intent; he looks consumed by it. Will feels consumed

by him, big, firm hands and nails cutting in. He's being as gentle as Will might have expected. He partly wishes it weren't so. He thinks he can control this, if he can make himself ask. He's not sure he can at this instant, breathless and roiling from the pleasure. It's all he can do to hold himself upright.

"Stop, wait," he gasps, shivering.

Hannibal immediately looks up, lips still parted. Will groans.

"Oh fuck - I need you to fuck me - please-"

“Do we need protection?”

“No,” Will touches his jaw gently, “but thank you for asking.” Their lips meet in another long kiss, rough and endless until Hannibal pulls back with a sigh.

"Lie down for me?”

Will goes down, whining at another skim of Hannibal’s hand between his thighs. Hannibal leans to his nightstand, coming back with lube. Will reaches down to stroke him while he opens it up; smears some onto his cock. Hannibal's face has gone taut and intent, teeth digging into his plush lower lip.

"Come on, darlin'," Will murmurs.

Hannibal's eyes are bright, intent. He lines himself up to press in. Will wraps his legs around his waist and pulls him in with a groan. They both gasp as Hannibal fills him up, bottoms out.

"Oh, Jesus," Will breathes.

"Not precisely," Hannibal chuckles, nosing at his neck.

Will groans in dismay. "Move, Hannibal."

He does, drawing up on his arms to look down between their bodies, rolling his hips smoothly forward. Will wraps his legs around Hannibal's trim waist.

"God, that's good-" Will grits.

"Gorgeous," Hannibal murmurs.

He rocks shallow and slick at first, pulling Will taut with the stimulation. He reaches between them to stroke his own cock, whining at the wetness he finds. A few sharp snaps of Hannibal’s hips have him crying out, and he can’t look away from the satisfaction in those maroon eyes.

"So good for me, Will," he breathes.

Will only gasps, heat spreading down his chest and throat, rending him breathless. "More, god please..."

Hannibal rocks his hips harder. It's so pure, seeing him like this. Feeling his flesh. Feeling his need. He's flexing his jaw like he can't compute what he's feeling; can't do anything but bare his teeth and take more. He looks primal and beautiful. He bows his head between his arms to kiss Will, tongue teasing at his upper lip. His hips keep flexing, rubbing Will just right.

He stretches out beneath Hannibal, fingers working fast over his slick cock, jaw slack. “Oh-!”

"You feel perfect," Hannibal groans.

Will can't speak, so he just nods, clutching at him with his other hand. He twists it into the hair at the back of Hannibal's head, kissing him deeply. They move together fluidly, all heavy breaths and skin slapping, and then Will tugs his hair gently.

"Mm - can I go on top-?"

Hannibal groans softly and rolls them in one quick movement. Sinking down onto him is more intense than Will expected, and he gasps, grabbing for the headboard.

"Been a minute since I last did this," he mutters.

"For me as well," Hannibal breathes.

That steadies Will a bit. He touches the centre of Hannibal's chest as he starts to move. It's good enough to make him drop his head back. He fucks himself slowly on his cock, every breath vocal and shuddery, his nerves singing.

Hannibal's fingers take over stroking him rhythmically. It feels so much better than his own hand.

"Oh-" Will clenches and tips forward into the touch, crying out softly at the change in angle.

"Let me feel you," Hannibal murmurs.

Will drives his hips harder, motions long and taking. He's so close he aches. He can feel slick on the inside of his thighs. Hannibal can surely feel it too. His hands work Will up to the edge and slowly, inevitably, over it. He almost sobs with it, slowly wound up and suddenly flooded with light. Hannibal holds onto him with gentle hands when he stops moving.

"All right?" he murmurs.

"Yes," he nods shakily, "yeah - sorry... God. I'm sorry, you haven't -"

"It's fine, take all the time you need." He strokes Will's hair gently.

Will takes a few deep breaths and then rolls his hips again, slowly as he can. Hannibal hisses softly.

"Will-"

"I'm good. I want to."

And he does. Hannibal groans and holds on. It won't take much, not with the way he's straining up; tugging Will faster gently. He pushes himself up under him, fastens his mouth to Will's.

Will tastes his moan when his movements stutter. His hips jerk in great, unsteady pulses before he comes, hands diving into Will's hair to keep him close. They stay bent together, clutching close, panting one another's air. Hannibal dips his head, kissing his chest and shoulders with the slow exploration they hadn't taken time for earlier.

They roll over again slowly, issuing twin sighs of displeasure at separating. Hannibal's lazy kisses continue after he's cleaned them up with his boxers in a somewhat less gentlemanly manner than Will had imagined. Will smiles and makes a lazy exploration of his own. Hannibal feels hard and warm and pleasant over him. Will wonders if he works out, and can't quite keep his amusement in a bottle at the thought of Hannibal on a treadmill.

Hannibal pinches his side. "And why are you grinning?"

"I was thinking you don't seem like a guy who goes to a gym, but you're pretty stacked."

"I go several times a week to swim and run on the track," Hannibal replies.

Will hums. "Could stand to see you in a Speedo."

"I can oblige that; I am permitted to bring guests." Hannibal smirks.

Will hums. Thinks of being half naked in public. "Maybe."

"Swimming would be good for your shoulder," Hannibal adds.

"So it would, Doctor."

He kisses the shoulder in question, but doesn't push. Will strokes his hair and closes his eyes. He's still twinging with pleasure, mellowed by it. Hannibal's blend of brute strength and romance is a hard thing to resist.

"Will you be offended if I fall asleep?"

Hannibal laughs softly. "No. Can you stay the night?"

"My neighbor’s kid is gonna walk and feed the dogs. I might have to leave early."

"That's all right," Hannibal murmurs, sounding pleased.

Will thinks the kiss he gives him might be positive reinforcement. He's feeling pretty pleased about the arrangement himself, even though it had felt presumptuous. It was just in case he ran late - but they'll be all right until morning. He is far too comfortable to move, his entire body taken over by a lazy contentment.

Hannibal is stroking down his chest slowly, chin propped comfortably on his shoulder. "Late night dessert?"

"Short nap first?"

"It's a deal," Hannibal murmurs. Will beams and gives him a sleepy kiss as Hannibal sets an alarm. He falls asleep almost instantly.

*

When they wake up to Hannibal's bedside clock, he feels unbelievably warm and comfortable. It'd be easy to sleep again, but Hannibal is kissing behind his ear, hands gently sweeping over his stomach.

Will hums and turns into it. "What's for dessert?"

"Depends what you have patience for. I'll have to prep it."

"Don't go crazy. I'd like you back in bed at some point."

"Come down with me," Hannibal replies.

"Yeah - of course. I wasn't going to wait up here." Will chuckles.

“No, of course. I might have a shower first, if that’s all right.”

“Yeah. I’ll go in after.”

"I'll leave something clean on the bed for you," Hannibal offers. "The en suite is at your disposal."

"Thanks," Will smiles, kissing him soundly before he lets him go. He dozes for another few minutes while Hannibal washes up, and then stirs at his hand on his shoulder; a mutter that the bathroom is free.

He takes his time washing up, finding his own boxer briefs folded neatly on top of a fresh pair of pajamas. He forgoes them: they won't do him much good if his usual reaction to Hannibal's proximity is anything to go by. The pajamas are soft and warm, a crew neck and plaid bottoms that Will can't imagine Hannibal wearing. He wonders if they were a gift, or if Hannibal keeps spares on hand for - visitors. That doesn't seem quite his style.

He goes downstairs and finds Hannibal in the kitchen watching a stand mixer. Will's attention is momentarily caught by something unexpected on the fridge - a postcard and a magnet.

"What are you making?" Will asks absentmindedly, strolling to look at the picture.

"Chocolate mousse. Quick." Hannibal smiles at him; sees what has his attention. "From my sister. She's in Italy at the moment. One of our childhood haunts."

He moves the magnet to see the full picture; politely leaves the message side pressed to the fridge. It's a beautifully rendered drawing of a marble saint. Will tilts his head.

"*Orsanmichele*. That's in Florence, isn't it?"

"Very good, Will. Yes, it is."

"She drew this? She's fantastic. Is she younger?"

"Yes, she's quite a bit younger than me. Close to your age, I believe."

"I'm thirty-four."

Hannibal nods. "I was right." He smiles at the thought. Will is charmed by the obvious affection in his face. "Her name is Mischa. She is an exceptional young woman."

"It seems she is." Will replaces the magnet.

Hannibal tempers melted chocolate with what seems to be cream and egg whites, whisking steadily. "It's the first piece of correspondence - outside of bills of course - I've had to this house."

"That's nice," Will smiles. He goes to tuck himself against Hannibal's back, sighing in content: he's wearing the apron again. Will really likes that damn apron. He tucks his hand into the pocket while Hannibal pretends to ignore him. He moves unnecessarily slowly between tasks, though.

Will noses behind his ear and hums softly. He laughs when Hannibal passes a spoon over his shoulder for Will to taste. He elongates his neck to reach, then holds a hand under his chin as he pulls back.

"God, that's good."

Hannibal laughs softly. "That's the idea."

"I can see I'm going to have no choice but to join you on your swims after this."

"My evil plan has come to fruition," Hannibal says dryly. He starts filling small dishes from his mixing bowl.

"Truly a super villain of the highest order," Will purrs, accepting a bowl and a cup of the forgotten whiskey from earlier. "Thank you..."

He nearly bobbles both when Hannibal leans in for a kiss instead of saying "you're welcome." He rescues it, and follows him into the living room after Hannibal has discarded his apron. He pretends not to stare at his back as they go. But he knows he is.

Judging by his expression, Hannibal knows too, sitting Will down in the freshly decorated room and leaving his bowl before he goes to turn on the fire.

They both sigh happily at the first bite. "You should open a restaurant," Will mumbles, "or just - become a full-time feeder."

Hannibal smiles at the carpet. "I think the term you're looking for is 'stay at home husband'. Unless you're talking fetish, which is its own discussion," he adds with a smile.

Will chokes on a laugh and has to thump his own chest for a minute. "I wasn't."

"I know." Hannibal touches his wrist and smiles.

Will smiles, pink-cheeked and breathless. Hannibal looks quite pleased with himself. Hannibal makes him smile quite often, actually. He realizes it now. Will leans into him, savoring the warmth of the fire. And his mousse. It's amazing. Moments like this make him think of things he shouldn't - things that aren't fair on either of them.

It's Hannibal's fault, he said it first. He bites his lip at the thought.

"So you and your sister grew up with your aunt and uncle?"

Hannibal nods. "Mostly, yes."

"Mostly?"

"We were in an orphanage for a short time while my Uncle Robert was... located."

Will tilts his head. "That's horrible."

"It was... what it was." He gives him a wan smile. "I had Mischa."

"Yes," Will murmurs.

Hannibal loops a gentle arm around his shoulders. "Don't sound sad for me. I'm very fortunate in a great many ways. Chiefly in this instance." He smiles fondly.

Will blushes, stuttering a bit. "I - I mean, I'm -"

Hannibal watches until Will manages a soft "thank you," then he smiles wider. He's gorgeous. Will looks miserably at his bowl so he won't catch himself out. "Your uncle found you," he prompts.

"Yes, he wasn't in the country when my parents were killed - he was an artist too, you see."

“I see.” Finally, Will's mind catches up, and he turns on him, triumphant. "You said you were going to show me your work!"

Hannibal smiles. “I did.”

"Is that still an option?"

“Of course, they’re just in a chest of drawers in the study.”

Will waits, visibly expectant, and Hannibal laughs and sets his empty bowl down.

"Come." He leads them into the next room, flipping on the lights and heading for a wooden cabinet.

Will waits at the desk, habitually fingering the carving. The stack of drawings Hannibal removes from a drawer is tall, and Will suspects it's only a fraction.

He comes to the desk and spreads them for his inspection. Will is speechless for a full minute, just ruffling softly through.

"You... you made it sound like it was a casual hobby."

"I have never made a formal study of it, except with my uncle."

"These are incredible," Will says, genuinely.

Hannibal smiles down at the table. "Thank you."

Will touches at one of the edges of the paper; Michelangelo's Pieta.

"Is it a Lecter trait, loving biblical art?"

"We were trained on the classical masters."

"I appreciate it."

"Art in general? Or mine in particular?"

"Both, Hannibal."

Hannibal turns a warm glance on him. Then, his face does something Will can't quite name until he sees him look at the sketchbook in his hands. He hadn't noticed it before.

"Hannibal - did you draw me in here?"

Hannibal looks down. Will has never seen him fidget before.

"Did you?" he murmurs.

Hannibal just opens up the sketchbook and wordlessly offers him the page. Will takes it and stares.

"Jesus," he mutters, "Hannibal..." He's drawn in the manner of some sort of Greek champion. Everything from the likeness to the style is perfect. "It's beautiful," he mutters, cheeks heating.

"Thank you, Will."

"It's fine - don't thank me." Will knows he's being rude, but he is feeling too many things - he almost can't stand being next to him right now. It occurs to him he should probably make that clear. "I'm sorry - I'm a little overwhelmed."

"I apologize if I contributed." Hannibal lifts the book gently from his hands.

"No - it's not that. It's not that."

Hannibal looks skeptical.

"I'm sorry," Will says softly, "sorry. I'm not mad - it makes me feel. Vulnerable."

Hannibal nods and turns away to replace his sketches. It makes Will feel itchy; taut with embarrassment and frustration at himself. It's not that Hannibal's drawing wasn't beautiful, or flattering - it's that it was blisteringly honest. All his infatuation laid bare on the page. Will feels like he's been reading his diary; like it’s enough to leak from Will’s own pores. He turns away, muttering about using the bathroom, and he goes. A sink full of cold water shocks some of the fog out of his head, though the echoes of infatuation still linger. Like a perfume.

It's not even that it's unwanted or unrequited. That's what scares him, he thinks. In fact, that’s definitely what scares him. He sighs and clutches the hand towel to his chest for a minute before he returns to the living room, where Hannibal is waiting for him.

He offers a smile. Hannibal offers his glass of whiskey.

"Thank you," Will murmurs, sitting back down beside him on the sofa. Hannibal smiles in response.

"Are you well?"

“Yeah, thanks, sorry.”

Hannibal doesn't press; doesn't ask him to explain himself. Even so, he seems troubled. Will reaches tentatively to touch him. His fingers stroke through his fine hair, still tousled from before.

“Hannibal,” he murmurs apologetically. He leans in and kisses under his ear gently. "I'm sorry."

“I understand, Will. Truly.”

"I'm not good at this. I didn't mean to be - it was such a beautiful drawing. You're. You're beautiful." He kisses his neck again. Hannibal sighs and tucks a hand against his waist, and Will leans gratefully into it. “I want you,” he whispers.

"How do you want me, Will?"

“Back in your bed. Do you have a toy drawer, Hannibal?” He visibly swallows at the question. Will laughs a bit. “Show me.”

Hannibal nods; leads him upstairs by the hand. Will’s stomach feels tight with the expectation; the nervousness built up from his moment of overwhelm. It's only partially relieved by Hannibal backing him up against the bedroom wall and kissing him senseless. At the end of it, he can’t do anything other than cling to him. Hannibal seems to have expelled some of his own caution and he's rougher now, teeth on Will's shoulder and hands moving over his skin.

“What do you want?” He murmurs. “What do you like?” He pulls Will over to a chest of drawers in the corner.

"Wow," Will mutters, "that's... a lot of money."

Hannibal just looks at him evenly. “I enjoy quality and aesthetics as much as function.”

"I can see that. Which one do you want me to fuck you with?" He watches the thought work its way through Hannibal’s mind along with the flush up his throat.

"I don't have..."

"That's fine, I can fuck you just as well with my hands."

Hannibal bites his lip. “I want to see you sometime.”

"You can," Will promises. “Which one?”

“You pick.”

He selects a dildo from the drawer, watching Hannibal’s eyes dilate. They’re both holding their breath, which is ridiculous.

"Okay?" He checks. Hannibal nods.

"Okay." Will closes the drawer before he spends an hour just looking through it. He's very curious about some of Hannibal's collection.

"Condom?" He murmurs. He wishes he'd thought to wear the packer that would have made all this easier, but with Beverly there it had been awkward. Hannibal opens the bedside drawer from before and hands one to him silently. Smiling, Will takes both to the bed and Hannibal follows.

"Hands and knees," Will murmurs. He watches Hannibal strip efficiently and obey with his lower lip between his teeth. He's so beautifully self assured; elegant with it. Will kneels behind him and kisses the small of his back, smiling and repeating it when Hannibal sways into the touch, unable to get enough of the softness of his hips; of watching muscles bunch and shift under his skin. He bites experimentally and smiles at Hannibal's answering hum.

“You like that,” he murmurs.

"I like everything you see fit to give me."

Will breathes out. “Yes?”

"You know I do."

He can feel the looming truth of it, but it mostly makes him eager. He dips his mouth and slowly licks, spreading his cheeks gently with his thumbs. Hannibal’s back arches and he hisses Will's name softly. It turns into something more urgent when Will continues to lick him

open, fingers pressing crescents into his hips. He's enchanted by the noises Hannibal makes, honest and pure and filthy.

Will reaches between his thighs to curl a hand around his cock as he strokes in with his tongue. He murmurs encouragingly when Hannibal rocks his hips into it.

"That's it," he mutters, squeezing gently, "pretty like this."

Hannibal makes another small, lovely noise. It earns him another few slow curls of Will's tongue before he pulls back and picks up the bottle of lube; slicks his fingers. Both hands, one going back to Hannibal's cock and the other following the path of his tongue after he discards the bottle. He presses inside him with a slow, twisting motion, and Hannibal takes it with nothing but a long breath.

“Used to that?” Will breathes.

Hannibal huffs a laugh. "Not especially."

“Too bad, I liked the picture. You fucking yourself open and using one of your toys...” He strokes purposefully with the pad of his finger and watches Hannibal's thighs flex. “You hide all this under those suits,” he murmurs. “I like seeing it.”

"Then it's a very good thing you are allowed," Hannibal says softly. His voice sounds a bit faraway already. Will bites his lip and strokes harder, pleased when his efforts yield a soft, shaking sigh. He leans down to kiss his hip again, starting to ease in with a second finger, his other hand skimming back to the heavy heat of his cock. He circles gentle fingers around the head, and Hannibal breathes in.

"Oh," he says, quiet as water, "Will..."

Will licks his lips; crooks his fingers to stroke his prostate. Just the lightest touch makes him exhale harshly.

"There we go," Will murmurs, "is that good?"

“Perfect,” he gasps.

That makes Will smile. He's aching where he's knelt, scorched deep from watching his fingers disappear into Hannibal. Every new press makes a shiver run down Hannibal’s muscled back. Will is patient but he's not inhuman. He lines his third finger up when he draws back and gently presses in. They both gasp this time.

Hannibal reaches back for him, grasping at his hip.

“Will, darling, please.”

"Just a little more," Will promises.

Hannibal groans and lets his head drop between his arms. It's entirely too good to see him react when usually he's so calm. Will finds it’s something he could develop a craving for.

Finally, he eases his hand back and retrieves the toy from his lap, prepping it with shaking hands.

"Just a moment."

Hannibal nods, fingers flexing against the covers. Will noses against his back as he straightens up, moving closer and using both hands to guide the toy against him.

"Ready?"

“Yes, Will,” he murmurs. They both take a deep breath as Will starts to ease the head in, reaching to stroke him again as he presses and gently turns his wrist. Hannibal releases a slow groan with his breath.

"Okay?" Will leans over to nose at his shoulder.

“More,” he demands softly, and Will gives it him, pushing the toy in deeper slowly before he starts to pick up a push-pull rhythm. Hannibal follows it, hips bridging into it. His breaths are labored now. Will kisses his shoulders slowly.

“You like that?”

"That's a matter of understatement."

“You can still say big words. Maybe I need to go harder.”

"If 'understatement' is considered a big word, maybe so."

Will bares his teeth in a grin and works the toy harder, until he gets a moan. Even then he doesn't let up. Hannibal grinds back against him, and Will presses his open mouth against his spine.

"Fuck, Hannibal. I love fucking you." Will licks his lips. “I already want to do it again.”

Hannibal nods vehemently, spine arching as Will strokes into him harder with the toy, the slick press of it sliding easy now. He holds his fingers in a loose fist around Hannibal’s cock, barely moving them, barely needing to as Hannibal rocks.

It's dizzyingly hot; Will is sucker punched by the fierce swell of arousal in him. His body clenches hard on nothing and Hannibal gasps softly at a little stall in his movements that makes him push deeper. Will makes a low noise and squeezes harder. He moves the toy rhythmically again, keeping it smooth and steady. Hannibal moans now, stifled but unmistakably Will’s name.

"Oh - yeah," Will sighs, “that’s it, baby, let me see.”

Hannibal's breathing is rough now, hands wringing the sheets and his back muscles coiled tight as Will fucks him. Will bites his lip as Hannibal bucks into his hand. He strokes him faster in turn, smiling at the low, rough groan he gives. He sounds close, but Will isn't sure he's ready to stop fucking him yet. He slows, nipping his shoulder.

"Tell me how it feels. What you're thinking."

“The best part is your hands on me,” Hannibal whispers.

"Yeah?" Will shifts until he can press bodily against him from behind, arching slowly and letting his beard scrape Hannibal's nape as he keeps working the toy deeper. His other hand hooks back under Hannibal's body to resume his teasing strokes.

He can feel Hannibal trembling under him, muscles jumping and breathing unsteady. He grips back at Will again over his shoulder.

"Next time - I want you like this, Will. Please."

“You can have whatever you want,” Will breathes. He kisses his throat and eases the toy in faster, in short, sharp strokes. Hannibal feels impossibly harder in his hand, body straining tight. Will bites at the side of his neck and feels Hannibal's moan vibrate against his teeth as his hips buck again.

Will groans against his skin. He drives the base of the toy harder with the flat of his fingers and strokes Hannibal off.

“Come for me,” he orders.

Hannibal's fingers find Will's hair and pull tight as he locks up and does as he's told with a harsh gasp, streaking Will's hand and the sheets beneath them with his release as Will fucks him through it. He gentles both hands after a moment.

Hannibal's thighs are shaking. He's breathing like he's trying to calm himself. Extracting the toy and setting it carefully aside once he's stripped the condom off, Will touches him.

"Hey - you all right?"

“Will,” he breathes.

"I'm here." He goes to him, stretching out on the sheets and pulling him gently down into his arms. "Talk to me?"

Hannibal murmurs something in French, or maybe Italian. Will can’t quite translate. “It’s been - been a long time,” Hannibal tells his shoulder, clearly trying.

Will swallows the knot of concern. He keeps his hands on him; keeps him close.

"It's been a while since you let anyone see you like that, huh?"

“It isn’t -“ more French, something Will thinks he can understand this time.

“How people want you to be?”

Hannibal takes a deep breath, and seems to be calming slightly with the sweep of Will's hand down his back.

“I just want you to be yourself,” Will tells him.

He nods, murmuring his gratitude against his skin. Will keeps him close, tucking his cheek against Hannibal's hair and sighing softly. His own body thrums, there but ignorable. He hurt Hannibal by withdrawing from him before. He doesn't want to ignore him now. Having Hannibal tucked against him so completely feels good in a way he doesn’t want to analyze or give up. He noses at him slowly. He doesn't want him to go inside his head.

"Thank you for letting me see you like that."

This time Hannibal sighs his name. He leans up and kisses him, so sweetly intimate that it Will nearly catches his shivers. Then he does, at the feel of gentle fingertips tracing his spine.

"Okay?" He whispers, against Hannibal's lips.

“Yes, yes,” Hannibal answers. He closes his eyes and smiles when Will strokes his hair back. Will smiles back automatically.

"You were beautiful. Still are,” he adds.

Hannibal sighs and kisses his throat.

“You are always beautiful.”

"Well, so are you..."

“I find I cannot get you out of my mind,” Hannibal says quietly. Will sighs softly and touches his chest.

"Me neither. I've had a nice time."

“Even though you haven’t -?“ Hannibal looks solicitous.

"I just wanted to make sure you were okay."

Hannibal smiles and touches his cheek. “Yes, never better.”

"Never better, that's promising." He closes his eyes fondly, making a soft noise when Hannibal dips and kisses his throat. Hannibal's hand slipping between his thighs stokes a louder one out of him, making him arch.

“Will,” Hannibal murmurs. “So patient.”

"I'm used to being patient."

“You’re amazing,” Hannibal tells him, fingers circling, spreading slick up over his cock in gentle motions. Will can't help but arch, lips parting on a groan. “Tell me how you want to come,” Hannibal murmurs.

Will shivers at the words. He wants everything, so much. He wants Hannibal to utter distraction. He's still sensitive from fucking himself on his cock.

"I want your mouth," he murmurs softly.

The noise Hannibal makes is the most enthusiastic agreement he could imagine. He pushes himself down the bed and runs soft hands up Will’s thighs. He seems incensed by the permission; by the sheer want for his touch. Will can't hold back a moan as he grazes his teeth against his inner thigh; makes a circle with his index and thumb around Will's cock and strokes him while his mouth explores.

He slowly coaxes Will into a state of pure need, moving between sweeping, deep laps of his tongue and gentle sucks over his cock as he strokes. He keeps everything gentle and without real intent, just getting him wet and swollen and breathless. It seems aimless, unless an endless exploration is his aim. Maybe it is.

"Hannibal-" it sounds more pleading than Will had strictly intended. Hannibal looks up, meeting his eyes. "God you're good-" Will murmurs, around a whine, "can I have your fingers? Want you inside me-"

In the space between breaths, one hand shifts to thrust two fingers inside him. Will groans softly at the press of his thumb against his taint, mouth closing over his cock completely now and sucking. He's on the edge in moments, just from the direct stimulation and the gentle rub inside him.

Hannibal works his tongue and keeps him there for endless moments. Finally, he sucks again, and Will grabs his hair and shoves up with his hips as he comes, thighs shaking and toes curling. He groans Hannibal’s name. It feels raw and fierce, but Hannibal doesn't let up, and it's a few moments before Will understands why.

"Fuck-"

Hannibal keeps working his fingers even deeper, sucking him in between strokes.

"Hannibal - oh - fuck-" he doesn’t know how long he can last like this. Not long. His entire body is already shaking. He draws up again, panting hard. Hannibal’s free hand soothes along his thigh. "Hannibal - oh, fuck, I'm gonna come again," he hisses, floored: he never does, always waits too long and has to coax himself back to the brink. Hannibal makes it all easy.

Will comes again with a shaky cry, knuckling his hair gently to push him back. It’s not any better when he goes; his lips are obscenely red and swollen and his eyes are hungry.

"Jesus," Will breathes, "you're perfect."

Hannibal shakes his head. “Lucky.”

"Can you come here? I think I'm having a heart attack," Will chuckles.

Hannibal lays a solicitous hand on his chest, lips twitching. “Doesn’t feel like it.” He tilts his head. "It is beating fairly quickly, though."

"Your fault." Will pulls him down, needing his weight. Hannibal covers him like he knows exactly what to do. It drags another sigh out of Will; a surge of affection. He’s nearly ready to sleep now.

He just takes a moment to clean up, check his phone to make sure nothing has befallen the dogs, and then he's back.

Hannibal is stretched under the rumpled covers like some fallen god. Will sinks down into his arms gratefully when he lifts the covers.

“You’re warm,” he murmurs.

"You're cold now." Hannibal rubs his back gently. Will lets himself be soothed and warmed by his touch. He's startled by how good it feels; no instinctive cringe or irritation. Just heavy, pleasant comfort. He lets himself sink into the sheets. Hannibal presses a kiss behind his ear and they settle into silence, and sleep.

Chapter 5

Hannibal's arm is slung heavy and warm over Will's waist when he wakes up. He doesn't usually sleep well with other people, but he's slept through until morning light. He takes a slow breath, anxiety swelling in his chest at the thought of what that could mean.

Carefully, he starts to extract himself from Hannibal's arms. Even his own body seems to fight his efforts; his shoulder twinges. That's not what he wants. He wants it to be easy; escapable.

But it's too late; Hannibal stirs. Will stalls, watching his eyes flutter open and feeling unreasonably fond of the sight.

"Hey," Will says, voice hoarse with sleep. "Sorry to wake you, I've got to go."

Hannibal nods, sitting up and pushing his hair back. He looks unfairly appealing with all his bare skin on show.

"Can I make you some coffee-? Do you want a shower?"

"No, no, I can't. I'm sorry, I really can't." He can't keep the panic out of his voice. Hannibal pauses, then nods again.

"All right, Will."

"The dogs -"

"Of course." Hannibal nods. "I understand."

Will grimaces. He slips out of bed and starts to gather up his clothes before he can acknowledge that he's feeling guilty. He's sure Hannibal knows: he leaves Will to get dressed silently, disappearing into the bathroom. That's somehow worse than him just watching in confusion. It's early enough that Will knows he doesn't have anywhere else to be.

When he's dressed, he hovers downstairs until Hannibal joins him in his robe.

"Thank you," he says, smiling nervously.

Hannibal tucks his chin to his chest in a polite nod.

"It was my pleasure."

"I'll see you – Tuesday?"

"Of course." Hannibal nods. He doesn't make any move to touch Will, like he senses his sudden reticence. It's Will who leans in for a quick, unsatisfying kiss.

"Take care." He says, and practically throws himself out the door.

He scolds himself for most of the ride home.

"For once in your life, can you try not to roll over someone who's trying to give you what you want because you think you don't deserve it?" He hisses to himself, changing gears with rather more force than necessary and making the engine clunk. He doesn't answer himself. That's a slippery step too far down the crazy slide. He's furious at himself the entire drive home.

*

When the dogs are fed, he stands in the grass and watches the taller ones' tails bob amongst the grass while they sniff and dig. He can still smell Hannibal on himself. He's loath to wash it away. It seems to require more energy than he has.

Instead, he spends the day wrinkling his nose at himself as he works in the barn, the dogs occasionally rustling in and out of the open door. Winston and Dakota stick close by him. Buster tries to kill him by tripping him while he carries a dresser. Fortunately, he doesn't succeed. Unfortunately, Will wrenches his shoulder.

He swears and grips it by himself that night: a hot shower and unsteady circling has done nothing to relieve the aching. Too bad he just ran out on his best bet for physio. He takes some painkillers and climbs into bed, miserably, self-imposedly alone. The dogs snuffle happily in their own beds. Their soft sounds lull him. Still, it's a restless sleep.

*

When he wakes up proper, after many instances in the night, the dogs are barking. He groans. Very few people show up unannounced here.

He goes to the door in his t-shirt and boxers, trying not to be aware of how filthy he must look. Alana waits on the other side, soft and cool against the crisp summer grass.

"Alana," he greets, trying not to sound as grouchy as he feels.

"I brought muffins," she offers, trying a smile.

"Oh no. What did I do?"

"What makes you think you did something?"

"Your... baked goods?"

She waits patiently for him to step back and let her in. He watches her greet the dogs with gentle hands before shrugging out of her coat and hanging it out of reach of flyaway tails. Finally, she looks at him again.

"Coffee?"

He shakes himself and heads for the kitchen.

"How are you?" He asks as he puts on a pot.

“I’m just fine, Will. How are you?” She’s watching him favor his shoulder with a faint frown.

"Dog tripped me," he explains, dodging the real question.

Alana clucks sympathetically. She refrains from any more questioning until she's seated at Will's modest table with a fat cup of coffee and the breakfast she bought.

“I heard you had a date,” she murmurs.

"Did you?" He stays deliberately oblique.

“I did. I saw Hannibal at the farmers market yesterday morning and we talked for quite a while.”

Will wants to ask what he said - though he can imagine - but he leashes himself fiercely. "That's good."

“Is it?” she murmurs.

He gives her a long look. "He was upset?"

“Nothing as obvious as that, but. He wasn’t himself. So I asked.”

Will looks down and waits.

“I’m not judging,” she adds, “but he seems to think you decided you’d gotten what you wanted and then left.”

Will sighs at the table. “Got what I - I just had to get back to the dogs."

She tilts her head. Her generous silence irritates him almost as much as her carefully blank expression.

"I - panicked," he admits, finally. Not even a blink of surprise. Will feels suddenly predictable and immature. He looks down again. Buster is sitting hopefully by his foot. He knows better than to beg usually. Will knows better than to feed him usually too.

"Will," Alana says softly, stirring his thoughts, "I think Hannibal is the kind of person who will support you if you do him the courtesy of telling him the truth."

“What if the truth is I don’t want a relationship?”

"Then... you should tell him that." She waits again, letting it settle. "Unless... you're just not sure you can have one."

Will shrugs.

"He's different to me," he murmurs, not sure if it's an explanation or an observation. "He's charming, and cultured, and talented - and I live with a pack of dogs in the woods."

“That sounds more like not being sure if you can have one, Will.”

"It's not really a matter of not being sure."

Alana sighs.

"I did try to warn him I'm not really boyfriend material," Will mumbles, shamefaced.

“I bet you did a great job, with that puppy face of yours,” she snarks gently.

Will frowns at Buster again.

"He must have been pissed, for you to come all the way over here."

“Did I say pissed?”

"No. Maybe you seem pissed. Someone's pissed."

“Maybe it’s you,” Alana says skeptically.

"I'm." Will stalls, and then takes a sip of his coffee to prolong the silence. Alana waits. "I said I wanted casual, but there's nothing casual about him. Even before we were anything, it wasn't casual."

“Is that his fault, though?”

"I didn't say that," he says curtly.

“So you’re angry with yourself.”

Will sighs.

"I guess."

Alana sips her coffee, looking thoughtful. Will hates that she came all this way just to glare at him. He’d have found a way to ignore the guilt by now, otherwise.

"Do you think I've blown it?" he asks, surly with embarrassment.

“Do you want me to say yes?”

"I want the truth."

“With someone else? Yes. With Hannibal? Probably not.”

It takes Will another long moment before he summons the courage to look at her again.

"Any advice, Doctor?"

“Give yourself a chance to decide if you want something different.”

"Different than what?"

“Than whatever you’ve settled for.”

He fights the unhappy bow of his mouth. He feels too weak for those thoughts; wrong and broken and selfish for wanting. He pinches the bridge of his nose and feels Winston's cold snout nudge against his bare leg.

Alana frowns. She looks sorry.

"Will..." she reaches across the table and touches his arm. "I was a little mad at you when I got here. Now I'm just worried."

He doesn’t want that, not at all.

"I'm fine. Bad night, that's all. My shoulder is killing me."

He's considering crying off tomorrow to rest it, but that would mean not getting to see Hannibal - not getting to apologize. Alana squeezes his hand. He stalls, and then squeezes back.

"I like him, and I don't want to - get used to it."

“Why not, Will?”

He gives her a look.

“I’m not a keeper.”

"Why do you think that? Because of-?"

"No," he interrupts gently, "no. The other stuff."

“Will,” she sighs.

"Alana."

“I’m not going to get all therapist on you because I know you hate that.”

"Buuut?" He finally picks the wax paper off his muffin.

“Will; you need to talk to someone.”

"I have talked to people. I've talked to so many people. Alana, my personality has been put through a fine mesh sieve. I value being alone in my own head. I value that I don't have to justify my thoughts and feelings to someone anymore."

She stands irritably, mug abandoned, staring at his bookshelves.

"You don't like that Hannibal is a psychiatrist," she surmises, "or that he might figure out what's 'wrong' with you."

Will grimaces.

"Nothing is wrong with you, Will," Alana murmurs. At the automatic shake of Will's head, she folds her arms. "That doesn't mean you respond to things the way everyone else does, or that you require the same treatment as everyone else - but it's not a defect. You got stabbed, you got sick - that's not your fault. You're a good person, with a great many qualities "

"Positive ones?"

She smiles faintly. "Those too."

He sighs and rubs his eyes again. Hannibal had felt so good - been so kind.

"It just felt like too much. I got scared I was taking something I shouldn't."

"Something you didn't deserve?"

He sighs.

"Something I hadn't earned."

"You could consider it a gift, maybe," she says.

"Gifts are usually given mutually."

"What would you like to give back?"

"Not anything I've got readily available."

If he'd wanted the last word with Alana, he seems to have gotten it. She sighs quietly at the books again. At the very least she seems to know it's not a lack of willing on his part.

"I'm going to leave you be now," she whispers.

He sighs and nods. "Okay."

She silently carries the dirty dishes to his kitchen and slips out with a quiet goodbye. He stares at his table for a long time. Winston leans against his leg, and the others gather around too. Will presses his palms into his eyes and sighs hard. He feels helpless and useless. Lonely.

He sits for a while longer and then goes to find his cell phone, staring at the screen for a long moment before he can bring himself to call. Hannibal takes a while to answer, but when he does, he sounds clear and easy.

"Will?"

"Hi, Hannibal. How are you?"

"I'm well, thank you. Just finishing the dregs of the unpacking in the dining room. And yourself?"

“Working on some furniture, or at least I was.”

Hannibal makes a polite noise of interest, very careful. He’s always careful, Will realizes.

"I'm sorry I left so fast yesterday," he says, quietly.

“Will, you told me -“

"I know I told you, but I could have just been polite. I was giving myself an out because I thought I'd need one, and I woke up feeling like a piece of shit because I'd enjoyed myself so much and I'm - not used to it."

“You got your out, then,” Hannibal murmurs. He's not going to make this easy. Will deserves to struggle.

“And I’ve felt bad about it ever since,” he admits quietly.

Hannibal doesn't answer right away, but when he does, his voice is a faraway thing.

"It's not my intention to entrap you, Will. You've made your feelings on the matter clear."

“And you’re okay with that?”

"I would rather have you, in whatever capacity you feel happiest, than go without." He sighs. “If that still makes you feel you require an out...”

Will closes his eyes. A swell of painful denial pushes up under his lungs. "I don't want an out."

“I want to see you again.”

"You'll see me when I come fit your lights," Will manages to tease.

Hannibal laughs softly. “May I take you home after?”

Will bites his lip against the choking rise of emotion in him, nameless but greedy.

"I promised to cook for you, didn't I?"

“I believe you did.”

"Let's do that. I've got a couple of commissions I have to take care of this week in the evenings but - maybe Friday again? You could - you could stay." See Hannibal tomorrow at his house, cook for him Friday. It sounds casual enough, Will thinks. Hannibal still sounds understandably wary.

"We'll keep our options open for after dinner."

“That’s fair,” Will knuckles his eye again, frustrated.

He hears Hannibal's soft sigh.

“I thought so.”

Will itches his nape to relieve tension. "Alana came by."

“I was afraid she might do something like that.”

"Not afraid enough, obviously." Will frowns when Hannibal doesn’t immediately reply.

"Alana and I have been friends for a long time. We're protective of one another. As she's protective of you."

Will sighs. There are too many entanglements for his liking.

"Maybe if you're upset next time just talk to me," he suggests wryly.

“I didn’t intend to talk to Alana either,” Hannibal replies, equally wry.

"But you did." Will isn't sure why he's being difficult about this. Well. He is. He's embarrassed that Alana drove an hour to chew him out.

“I won’t apologize,” Hannibal replies.

"I'm not asking you to. Just - call me on it. I can take it."

“As you wish.”

Will sighs. "Are we okay?"

“Yes, Will. We are.”

"Okay." He rubs his eyes harder. He wishes they weren’t on the phone. So he could see Hannibal's extraordinary stillness; decipher what it was saying. He knows he could.

Finally, Hannibal draws a breath. "I apologize if I was too forward. I imagine that contributed to your distress."

“You weren’t,” Will is forced to admit.

"The drawing-"

"I loved it. I just. It meant a lot." Hannibal doesn’t deny it. Will fidgets. "I see myself through other people's eyes all the time, I can never turn it off - what they're seeing, what they see of me. I'd never seen myself like that before."

He can hear Hannibal breathing.

"When you were a detective, they feared you." Will doesn’t answer right away, so Hannibal continues. "And people you wanted close, they were afraid of what your work made you see."

“Yes,” Will sighs. He listens to Hannibal's kind silence and feels grateful.

“Empathy can be a barbed thing,” Hannibal says finally.

"It's just a loud thing, sometimes. Hear so many things in my head it gets hard to grab the right thread and pull."

“I understand.”

"Do you?"'

“I do, as it happens.”

Will doubts it, but Hannibal is full of surprises.

"Shall I make breakfast tomorrow?" Hannibal asks eventually.

“Only if you like,” Will murmurs.

"I wouldn't offer if I didn't want to follow through."

“I know. Thanks.” Will can tell he’s still upset. He bites his lip. "Tell me what to do to make it better."

“Just come to breakfast tomorrow.”

"Okay." It’s no hardship, and it seems to mean something to Hannibal to be allowed to feed people. "Want me to bring anything?"

"Just your good humor."

Will laughs. “Tall order.”

He thinks Hannibal is smiling too.

"Let tomorrow be our yesterday morning. Humor me?"

“I will be there with a smile.”

"Have a good day, Will."

“You too.”

He hangs up, feeling moderately better. He takes more painkillers for his shoulder and heads to shower: unfortunately, he still has work to do.

He loads the boxes holding Hannibal’s fixtures into the back of his truck before he goes to bed that night, smiling nearly unconsciously.

*

The next morning, he's reverted to twitchy with nerves when he gets to Hannibal's house.

Hannibal, when he opens the door, looks edible himself. He's wearing a soft sweater and casual pants. He steps back to let Will inside with just a smile. Will touches his arm as he goes past. He takes off his jacket and shoes and Hannibal whisks the jacket away, again in silence. Will understands: the last two days never happened. It's Saturday morning again.

Hannibal fixes his coffee first, brings it to him and hands it over with a warm look.

"Thank you," Will murmurs, perching at the breakfast bar with it, taking a sip before he raises his chin questioningly at Hannibal. Still hovering close, he leans down and kisses him lightly. Will smiles and touches his chest.

"Good morning."

"Good morning. Are you hungry?"

"Yeah, I could eat." He leans up for another light kiss. Hannibal leans their foreheads together, noses touching, and Will imagines their thoughts could transmit this way.

"Let's go sit down now," Hannibal says softly. Will nods, slipping his hands into his pockets gently. Hannibal leads him into the dining room.

"Can I help with anything?" Will asks, sitting down, wincing a bit when his shoulder zings. Hannibal pauses. He didn't miss that.

"No, it's almost ready." He leaves Will with a smile, just to go retrieve whatever smelled so good in the kitchen. Will looks around the dining room, noting the art on the walls, the careful centerpiece.

"It looks beautiful in here," he tells Hannibal when he reappears with a heavy black skillet.

"Credit where credit is due," Hannibal replies.

"Please, I made a plant pot."

"Croque Madame," Hannibal tells him patiently as he serves him his breakfast.

"*Merci*," Will says.

"*De rien*, Will." He serves his own and sits down, shaking his napkin out like a gentleman.

Will smiles up at him and picks up his silverware. The first bite has him a little speechless, so he waits until the second to look at Hannibal and smile again.

"When are you opening your restaurant?" he teases.

"We've already established I prefer cooking for friends."

"Just checking."

Hannibal smiles warmly at his own plate. Will sighs and relaxes minutely.

“What did you do yesterday?” he asks politely.

"Just finished some furniture. Couple of bookcases with a little filigree detailing. Staining."

“Lovely, I would enjoy seeing it.”

"I took photos to send to the buyer. I'll show you after breakfast?"

“Thank you.” Hannibal smiles down.

"What about you? Yesterday, I mean. Good day?"

“After we talked.”

Will looks at him.

"Yeah. Admittedly before that I was just getting chewed out." Hannibal makes the slightest face at the table. Will hums. "Not like I didn't deserve it."

Hannibal doesn’t look soothed by it.

"What did you do?" Will asks. "Yesterday."

“I worked on a paper I am writing for the Journal of Behavioral Psychology.” Hannibal touches his lips with his napkin and switches to his coffee.

"What's it about?"

“Post-traumatic stress disorders, primarily,” Hannibal murmurs.

Will goes quiet at that.

"Oh."

“It’s sure to be a controversial article. But I’m finding it elucidating.”

Will restrains a frown.

"In what way?"

“There seems to have been a recent change in perception of the disorder among the students I teach, that’s all.”

"I see."

“Does this interest you?”

"It interests me plenty. I just get wary around conversations about this kind of thing."

Hannibal switches back to his breakfast. “I’d be happy to let you read it if you’re interested.”

Trying to push down the defensive snarl, Will sips his coffee and says nothing.

“I’m looking forward to seeing the fixtures you’ve found,” Hannibal changes the subject deftly.

"Oh, yeah. I'll get them for you. I got copper for your room and the one for in here is a little more unusual, I think you'll like it though."

He offers Hannibal a tentative smile. Hannibal smiles back softly.

"I look forward to seeing them."

“I may need your help with the chandelier... I tweaked my shoulder this weekend,” Will admits.

"I'm not sure I'll be especially helpful in the chandelier department, but I can certainly offer something for the shoulder."

“You can lift, and tend my shoulder,” Will grins sideways.

Hannibal looks faintly put out, but he nods. He’s confusing; he’s certainly strong enough.

"Don't like getting sweaty?" Will teases.

“In certain circumstances.”

He keeps his expression pert. Will grins. He'd like to hedge his bets about which circumstances he could entertain today, but their newly re-established trust feels a little fresh for assumptions. He needs to be on his best behavior.

Hannibal tops up his coffee like a reward. It’s good enough coffee that it works to distract him.

"So you don't have work today?" He asks. He was sure Hannibal usually had appointments most days in the week.

“I need to finish this paper. I cancelled my office hours today.”

"Oh." Will nods. "Maybe I'll let you off chandelier hanging, then."

“I’m farther along than I expected,” Hannibal demurs. “Don’t hesitate to ask for help.”

"All right."

They exchange another smile and finish breakfast with an easier back and forth. Afterward, Will washes up while Hannibal dries. Hannibal heads to his office afterwards while Will goes to his truck for the lights.

Sure enough, it's easy enough to set up the sconces in the bedroom, though wiring them takes longer than he'd anticipated. Still, they look beautiful. He stands for longer than he intends,

just admiring the warm glow.

He rubs his shoulder unconsciously, starting to nudge his tools together with his toe. The chandelier will be beautiful too.

"Hannibal?" Will calls him as he goes down the stairs carefully. He hears the office door open. "Can you help me with the chandelier-? Do you mind? We can leave it until another day if you want-"

“No, it’s fine.” Hannibal brushes down his trousers and straightens his sweater.

Will can't help but smile.

“The crate is in my truck,” he murmurs.

Hannibal follows him outside, stance hesitant as he helps Will - albeit delicately - to take the fittings inside. When Will opens the box, his eyes widen. He doesn't say anything at first, just gently examines with his fingers.

“Antlers?” He looks up at Will questioningly.

"I thought it'd fit in here."

Hannibal smiles.

"It's perfect."

Will gets his tools ready and stations Hannibal under his ladder, having moved the table out of the way. Hannibal passes the fitting up to him when he's ready, steadying him while he strains to fix it in place. He’s sure his face is making all sorts of unpleasant expressions, but eventually he gets it fastened securely and can tell Hannibal to step back.

When he looks, Hannibal is smiling despite looking a little ruffled.

"Who made it?" He asks, tilting his head.

“Friend of mine, mostly does art installations, but he owed me a favor.”

"And the antlers."

"From around the farm," Will shrugs.

“Your farm, you collect them?”

“One of my dogs likes to sniff them out,” Will colors faintly at Hannibal’s expression. He adds quickly, "It was shedding season recently, there are tons around there."

Hannibal still looks transparently delighted. Will has to go fiddle with the light switch to collect himself.

"It's perfect, Will," Hannibal repeats. "Thank you."

“You’re welcome. If you...want to go upstairs and look at the sconces, I can just clean up down here.”

Hannibal looks at him for a beat, then nods toward the stairs.

"Come with me."

Will nods. Of course.

Upstairs, Hannibal turns on the lights and beams. “They’re exactly as I imagined.”

"Good." Will smiles.

Hannibal turns slowly, admiring the room. His eyes alight on Will.

"It was definitely missing something," he says softly.

Will bites his lip.

"Happy then? No finishing touches?" He smiles.

“If I think of anything....”

"Just call me," Will nods. He puts his hands in his pockets, blushing unbidden at Hannibal's smile.

“I’ll keep it in mind.”

They're quiet for a moment, then Will sighs.

"I should let you get back to work. Sorry to have called you away."

“Not a problem, Will. Is your shoulder -“

"It's nothing a bath and a rest won't fix, I'm sure." He ducks his head.

To his surprise, Hannibal doesn’t press.

"If there's nothing else you need, I'll let you get on," Will continues eventually.

“I’d love to have you stay, but I suppose we do both have jobs to do.”

Will nods, feeling a little stranded. Like he's damaged it beyond repair; like Hannibal has closed the door to casual fondness. He sighs softly.

"Okay. Well. I guess I'll see you Friday?"

“I’m looking forward to it,” Hannibal murmurs.

Will laughs, a shade of disbelief creeping in. "I bet. Charmer like me."

“As much as I enjoy preparing meals, it is a treat to have one made for me.”

"I'm not sure you'll feel like that after the fact."

“I am.” Hannibal steps closer and touches his shoulder. “I’ll walk you out if you are ready to leave.”

Will precedes him downstairs, fugged with anxiety. He collects his things from the dining room, still favoring his shoulder, and heads out to load them into the truck bed.

Hannibal pauses in the doorway, watching. There's a tension in him too, he can see it. Whatever easiness they'd regained in the kitchen somehow seeped away. Will watches him for a second.

"Hannibal..."

“Yes?” Hannibal smiles politely. It's maddening and awful. Will can't stand it. He does all he can think to do and goes to him, tugging him off the step and into a kiss. He feels Hannibal’s intake of breath under his hand.

"I don't want to lose you," Will says, against his mouth, "please don't let me. Tell me how to fix it."

Hannibal sighs his name. He kisses him in turn, and Will fastens his hand into his shirt to keep him close, grateful.

“I felt nearly sure you wished to keep things professional, at this point.”

"Hannibal," Will says, plaintively.

“Very well, I overreacted.”

"No, you didn't. I was out of order the other day and then I came to make it better and I didn't know how. It would have been easier if I'd have just said something. I'm not good at this."

“It doesn’t come naturally to some people, but you’re - I know you’re trying.”

"Yeah. I am." Will nudges their noses again. "Help me out?"

Hannibal studies him for a moment, stroking the side of his face.

"Let me look at your shoulder. Come inside."

Will knows he scheduled a full day for this install, even knowing he wouldn’t need one. He knows why. He goes inside. Hannibal takes him to the bathroom and opens the cabinets, rummaging. Will watches him remove several tubes and a towel from the linen closet. He flushes pre-emptively. He has to remember how good Hannibal’s hands will feel.

In Hannibal's bedroom, he flicks the towel neatly out on the bed and gestures. Will carefully removes his shirt. It's not as awkward as he thought it would be, letting Hannibal gently shift

him into position on his stomach, his sore shoulder bared toward him where he's stood at the edge of the bed. Hannibal rolls up his sleeves. The oil, when he uncorks it, is scented with something clean and herbal.

"Do you give a lot of impromptu massages?" Will asks, somewhat slyly.

“I can’t say I do.” He puts the warm, slick flat of his palm against the base of Will's shoulder blade and strokes upward firmly. "And my physiotherapy is probably subpar."

“I don’t think you know that word.”

"I have enough humility to know I cannot be the master of all arts," Hannibal says, a touch of wry to his voice.

Will chuckles.

"I bet you're the master of most."

“I do try.”

Will tries not to turn pink at the press of Hannibal's fingers, mind going to the other night.

"I'm sure."

Hannibal just hums, working on a stubborn knot.

"I'm afraid I must recommend you seeing a specialist about this shoulder, Will. Or else take a break from manual labor."

“Can’t,” Will grumbles.

"To which?"

“Manual labor is sort of my job.”

"You should consider the former then."

“Maybe,” Will sighs.

Hannibal works his thumbs in and Will's breath hitches when he pinches a tender spot. Hannibal hums an acknowledgement and goes softer.

"So do you have the day on Friday, or have you got work?" Will says, to distract himself from the sight of Hannibal's thighs. "I wondered if you wanted to walk the dogs again before dinner, we could go to the river."

“I can arrive mid afternoon, that would be - nice,” Hannibal murmurs.

"You sure? You don't have to."

“Walks with you seem to be my only exercise lately. My gym must feel quite replaced.”

"Oh, we were gonna swim, right?" Will hums thoughtfully.

“I still insist it would help your shoulder.”

"Well. We can go swimming if you want."

“Saturday?” Hannibal suggests.

Will looks up at him. He smiles a bit.

"If you want to, Hannibal."

“I do. Will we spend the night together?” he asks mildly.

"You said you wanted to see how Friday went," Will reminds him.

“I know how I wish it to,” Hannibal replies.

Finally, Will lets himself reach out and touch his hip gently. "I'd like you to stay."

“I’ll be prepared to, then.”

Will makes a rough noise at another tweak of pain, but it's not so bad when his face is burning with shy content. Being with Hannibal makes him happy; he’s not ready to analyze that. His hum turns pleased when Hannibal sits down on the edge of the bed to knead his shoulder from a different angle, the two of them connected at the hip. He refreshes the scented oil on his hands.

"Feels good," Will says, a little sheepishly.

“I know,” Hannibal murmurs. When Will glances, he's smiling. His voice is soft. "It would be a lie to say this is purely for your benefit, Will, I assure you."

Will laughs softly. "Good. How's your kitchen been treating you?"

“Admirably, I must say.”

"Glad to hear it."

Hannibal’s thumbs circle more lightly for a moment.

"Turn onto your good side for me."

Will nods and obeys, moving as smoothly as he can. Hannibal shifts onto his knees by the bed to face him, working into the front of his shoulder; the tender stretch where the joint sits. He's gentle as ever. Will can’t look away from his face. He notices with pleasure that Hannibal seems to be enjoying watching him too.

Will lifts his hand to stroke through Hannibal’s hair. Hannibal smiles and bends smoothly and silently to kiss him. It’s gentle and undemanding, as expected. His hand wanders down Will's

flank, lightly gripping as they kiss. Will sighs, relieved. Every casual kiss adds to the fragile well of confidence he holds inside.

Carefully, he curls an arm around Hannibal's neck to keep him close, savoring his warmth.

“You’re kind, no matter who’s benefitting. But I’m glad it’s both of us.”

"Kindness is subjective. I'd argue I'm being self-serving."

Will sighs fondly. “Always arguing.”

"How you like things, usually."

"Did I say I didn't?"

Hannibal chuckles. "No, Will."

Will kisses him again, nipping at his red lower lip. It's too tempting with him looking so soft and accessible. Will can't keep his hands to himself. He already knows Hannibal can't. It takes seconds for them to wind up chest to chest on the mattress.

"Your clothes will stain," Will mumbles, not really committed to the concern.

"I have a remedy for that," Hannibal shoots back.

"Well, good for you."

Hannibal laughs. "Will. I want you to undress me."

"Oh." He bites his lip, smiling sheepishly. In truth, he's eager enough that his hands fumble with hems and zippers.

Underneath he's warm and solid and gorgeous. Will sighs when their skin connects, humming at the drag of Hannibal's mouth against his jaw.

"I just want you so much," Will murmurs.

"I assure you the feeling is mutual."

Will smiles, tipping his head back to bare his neck. Hannibal obliges him with a nip, stroking down his flank and then starting to undo Will's jeans. Will wriggles to help him get them down. Then Hannibal kisses his throat again, tucking one big hand down the back of his boxers with a hum of content.

"This would be enough," he murmurs.

"Maybe for you."

He hears Hannibal laugh softly. "Duly noted." He squeezes gently.

Will sighs and kisses him again, easy and unhurried. He feels suddenly powerful, to know that this man will drop anything for him. The feeling is pretty mutual.

Hannibal winds his fingers through Will's curls and deepens the kiss. He's careful, and for once Will appreciates it. It builds slowly, a breathless heat. Will groans softly against his mouth. He shifts so their hips rub together. Hannibal's hand spreads against his back to keep him crushed close.

"So good, you feel so good," Will murmurs.

"Let me make you feel better," Hannibal murmurs.

"Anything." Will squirms, caught.

Hannibal rolls on top of him with a sigh. "Careful what you tell me."

"I don't need to be careful. I mean it."

Hannibal sighs again, hips rolling. It's almost Pavlovian, the way it makes Will arch and sigh, heat flooding his belly. They move so well together. Hannibal feels perfect. He's sucking lightly at the hollow of Will's throat, too, hair feathering across his face. Will touches the silver at his temples and gives a soft whine of encouragement. It's hard to lie back and be patient, but he wants Hannibal to take the lead.

He starts by peeling Will out of his underwear, setting those and the contents carefully aside before he skims his palm over his mons gently.

"What are you thinking?" he murmurs.

"Nothing intelligible," Will chuckles.

"I don't believe you," Hannibal teases.

"Trust me, it shouldn't be uttered aloud in polite company."

"You are not succeeding in making me less curious."

Will laughs, face heating. "I was thinking about you fucking me. I was thinking about your cock."

"How would you like me to?" Hannibal asks politely.

Will shivers, breathless already. "Uh - god, like I fucked you. Please." It's harder than he thought to ask, for some reason.

"Sounds wonderful," Hannibal murmurs, nuzzling his ear.

A grin curls at the corner of Will's mouth. "Wonderful, huh?"

Hannibal kisses him again, fingers slipping down to part his flesh.

"Hannibal - god," Will arches for his fingers with a sigh.

"Hard already?"

"Getting there."

Hannibal hums, fingers working. Will flexes under the touch, jaw slacking. He's starting to get seriously worried he'll struggle to go without Hannibal's touch when the time comes. Or without Hannibal's soft voice in his ear. He turns their cheeks together at the thought and sighs.

"Talk to me."

"I love feeling you warm to me," he murmurs back.

"I'm pretty partial to it, too." He shivers.

Hannibal gives him a fond smile and kisses him again deeply. "I want to feel you with every part of me."

"Let's see what we can do about that," Will grins.

Hannibal's mouth wanders down his jaw, teasing at stubble. "Turn over for me," he murmurs.

Will obeys, Hannibal's hands steadying his sore shoulder. At first he just feels the tip of his nose against his spine; the brush of his lips over muscle. Will shivers lightly. He's abruptly glad he came back. There's no avoiding this thing between them.

Will bites his lip at the thought as Hannibal kisses the very base of his spine, hands covering his ass, thumbs smoothing over his skin. His hips quiver at the touch, and the first pass of Hannibal's tongue startles a breathless whimper out of him.

"That's so dirty," he breathes, “I haven’t even showered - Hannibal-”

Hannibal hums, apparently in agreement, and shows no signs of stopping. Will doesn't know what he did to deserve such indulgence. He squirms against the sensation, then into it.

"Oh fuck-Hannibal..." He takes a deep breath. "Hannibal," he repeats.

"Will?" Hot breath makes him shiver.

"*More*."

He stutters on a gasp as Hannibal spreads him with his thumbs and starts to lick him in earnest, soft wet sucks that have Will rending the sheets in seconds. Hannibal is shameless with his mouth. Another swirl of his tongue and the soft press inside with the tip make Will gasp, arching hard.

"Jesus," he groans. It never would have occurred to him that Hannibal could be like this, when they met. It would barely have occurred to him that he could be like this.

The thought is interrupted by the gentle press of Hannibal's thumb, circling slick against his hole. Will groans weakly and bridges his hips. Hannibal hums against him, sounding pleased.

"Oh god, Hannibal-" Will can't help but gasp softly as he feels him ease inside. He's being gentle but relentless. It's Will who pushes; back for more, and down into nothing until Hannibal's other hand slips to cup him gently.

"Is that what you want?" Hannibal murmurs.

"I want whatever you want, Hannibal."

"I want everything, I can't pick."

Will sighs and squirms his hips, flushed. "I've already told you how I want you to fuck me, Hannibal. The details are irrelevant."

He feels Hannibal take a deep breath. That concept seems like it would be a bit foreign to him.

The experimental stroke of his thumb distracts Will for a moment. His hands are - god. Will can't even think about them without getting all distracted. When they're touching him he has no chance.

Hannibal pushes deeper, and Will makes an urgent, wounded noise. "Hannibal-!"

"I'm right here."

"Yeah - fuck, yeah, good." He can't think with the little circles his thumb his making, his other hand gently stroking over his cock. He drops his head down and pants lightly.

Hannibal kisses his skin again. He pulls away with the hand below Will; reaches for something in the bedside table. Will watches with his mouth buried against his own forearm to muffle some of his sounds. His thighs are starting to shake a bit, too.

Hannibal settles back behind him, touching his hip gently. "Let yourself feel it."

"Make me feel it."

Hannibal laughs softly. "As you like."

Will shifts, impatience creeping in. Hannibal shifts with him, taking both hands away now, to his unhappiness. "Hannibal - please, come on," Will pleads softly.

He hears the slick sound of lube on skin, then finally, finally feels his fingers again. Two now, teasing before pressing in. He's focusing on stretching him now and Will has to dip his head and groan. It's a strange kind of good, foreign and intense. Hannibal hums throughout it, softly like he isn't really aware.

Will is unfortunately only too aware of his own noises, soft and vocal. He's trying to let go, to be in his body and not his head. Maybe it's obvious, maybe it's coincidence, but Hannibal

puts his other hand on the back of his neck and twists his fingers and Will's attention is immediately pulled back to those two points of contact.

"More, please," he mumbles into his arm.

Hannibal's fingers push deep, making gentle sweeping motions, and Will groans weakly when he finally surges them in and out more rhythmically. He feels full and aching at the same time, Hannibal's other hand going back to circling through growing slickness.

"Shit," Will breathes, "Hannibal - can you-?" It ends in a whimper when Hannibal stops to listen. Will huffs, infuriated by his patience when he's fresh out. "Do it, I want you to fuck me now."

Hannibal kisses his spine gently and pulls his fingers free. Will breathes through his sudden spike of adrenaline. He's not sure if it's nerves or arousal or both. He's so aware of Hannibal; how badly he wants him - and how afraid that makes him. Then he feels Hannibal press against his ass again and whines.

"Ready?" Hannibal murmurs.

"Yes, fuck."

He's shivering already, whining at the brush of Hannibal's lips against his jaw before he guides himself against Will and starts to press. It feels - he doesn't know, he has to close his eyes against the sensation. It's enough of a stretch that he bares his teeth, and then it eases, and Hannibal is inside him and breathing hard against his shoulder. He kisses it softly between breaths, hips pulsing just slightly. Will lets himself be supported as Hannibal starts to move.

It's good. He can't even describe how, just the fullness seems enough to make him pant; Hannibal's closeness. It's far from the first time, but he'd forgotten how specifically right it felt.

"Fuck-" His tongue feels thick in his mouth, his body a needy curve. Hannibal's fingers work him from below, relentless as he continues to roll his hips. Gripping the headboard, Will pushes back, jaw slack and his shoulder tweaking with the tension. He's so wet he can hear it, shuddering already. He groans Hannibal's name.

"Tell me, Will," Hannibal breathes. He sounds rough and low, and Will wishes abruptly that he could see him.

"Can't think," he sighs. "Need you."

"I'm here," Hannibal assures, with another shot of his hips that's hard enough to make Will moan.

"Gonna -" he pants, grinding back into Hannibal, "gonna come." It's barely been minutes. He's partially horrified.

Hannibal stops stroking him, kissing the backs of his shoulders again. His hips still move, almost like he can't help himself. Will swears again loudly. Hannibal's fingers find him again, like he can't help himself.

Will grips his hand and laces their fingers, breaths stuttering. "Wait - I don't want it to be over yet-"

He can feel the breath that Hannibal draws in, the way he forces his muscles to relax. His hand lands next to Will's on the headboard and his thrusts go slow and deep and even instead of rapid. God help him, it feels even better.

"Hannibal, oh my god-"

Hannibal kisses his neck. "You feel -"

"Tell me."

"So alive, so hot. Like I've caught a being made of fire."

"That's how you make me feel," Will breathes, half hiding the words in his arm.

Hannibal sucks lightly at his neck. "We can burn together."

"Consuming," Will breathes, clutching back at his nape, baring his throat to him with a grateful gasp.

Hannibal's hands wander over his body.

The sweet, explorative nature of it coupled with the hard drives of his hips makes Will weak. When he drops his head to breathe out some of his overwhelm, he can see that he's quite literally dripping from the stimulation.

"Fuck," he gasps again. "Let me turn over, I wanna see you when you come."

Hannibal murmurs agreement against his shoulder and eases out. His hands are gentle when he helps Will settle back into position, Will’s whines low when he pushes back in. Hannibal's expression is raw and telling as he grips him and strokes in deep, tearing a unified groan from them both.

"Next time," Will whispers, thinking of the other night, “I’ll fuck you like this.”

Hannibal smiles, though he doesn't look like he's finding this arrangement to be lacking. "Any time." He arches his hips and Will cries out softly at the change in angle. Hannibal braces himself. "Touch yourself," he murmurs.

He knows the instant he does, it won't be long before he comes, not with Hannibal filling him up and fucking him hard.

"Please," Hannibal says.

"Yeah - fuck, I'm just not usually such a quick trigger." He bites his lip, reaching to stroke slowly over his cock.

"But I love it," Hannibal tells him, watching.

"Yeah?" The expression on his face makes heat pulse in Will’s belly as he circles lower to smear his wetness.

"Yes." Another hard rock.

Will's jaw drops. "Oh *fuck*, yes-" he sees Hannibal smile, teeth sharp. He's picking up pace again, breaths becoming fast and vocal.

"Gorgeous," he breathes.

Will can't speak, just stroking himself faster, eyes clenching shut. He's so hard, so close, it's almost too much. He keeps going, feeling the shocks travel up his spine, down his arms. When he comes, it's with a rough cry of Hannibal's name and a flood of slick.

Hannibal makes a rough sound of his own. He breathes his name, movements slowing, collarbones and shoulders glowing with exertion.

"Keep going," Will urges. He nudges him with his heels until Hannibal does. Every stroke draws out a new moan. Will is still oversensitive and hazy, but he can't look away. Hannibal looks harsh in the low light, face etched in lust and intent. His hands tighten on Will's hips and his jaw flexes as all the tension pulls him taut with his movements.

Will reaches up to touch his chest, knotting his hands into his hair to pull him down into a kiss. He feels him shake through his release, hips pistoning hard and groan smothered against his lips. He drops his head to Will's shoulder and pants into his skin.

Neither of them move for a good while, still clutching and breathing hard. Will turns his head and kisses his temple. Hannibal sinks down onto him, arms wrapping around him carefully. He breathes in underneath Will's chin.

"Perfect boy," he whispers.

Will sighs, touching gently over his back, feeling him shift his hips to pull out. They separate to clean up in Hannibal's en suite, taking turns, and then Hannibal tucks the towel they've been half on top of into the laundry basket before rejoining Will in bed.

"How do you feel?"

Will glances up at him from where he's settled against his chest. "Physically?"

"We can start there."

"My shoulder hurts," Will chuckles, "but fuck, I'm good. How're you?"

Hannibal smiles ruefully. "I was hoping not to hear that, I'm sorry."

"No, it's okay. My fault." Will laces their fingers again. He rubs his cheek against Hannibal's chest, humming in content when Hannibal strokes his hair.

"And should we talk about our developing habit of having sex to resolve tension, or is that a topic for another day?" he says, tone suffused with warmth. He chuckles when Will makes a scowly face up at him, unperturbed. “Another day then."

Will closes his eyes at another round of petting and sighs softly. He feels used and sore and very cared for. Hannibal wraps his arms tighter around his back and rests his cheek against his head with a small sigh.

"Can you stay for dinner?"

"Yes," Will replies immediately.

Hannibal makes a pleased noise. "I have just the thing."

Will likes the sound of that.

Chapter 6

The next few days, Will is busy with other projects, but Hannibal is not at all wandering around his house looking for things for Will to remodel; that would be ridiculous. He finishes his article, goes to his lectures, but not much else. He does call Alana to scold her for descending upon Will, though.

"Well, you weren't going to do anything, and he wasn't," she says, unapologetic, "someone had to."

"No, I don't think someone did. Not that I'm not grateful."

"Well, did he fix it?"

Hannibal isn't quite sure how to answer that. "Duct tape on ship bows," he says, dryly. "Will does not think he should be in relationships, and so there isn't a relationship to be fixed. He's just patching up leaks as they spring."

He hears Alana sigh on the other end of the line. "I was afraid of that."

"He's very good at it: I almost don't notice until he's gone, and we've moved no further."

"Of course he is; it's Will."

"You've never told me exactly what happened between you," Hannibal replies.

Alana's answering silence is careful. "Not that much," she says, eventually. "He was good at first - but I don't know. He was just... very unhappy, and very insular. He was still traumatized from being with the police and I... I don't know. I shouldn't have been dating him, ethically. I promised myself I'd never do it again - no one should have read their partner's file before they started seeing them. I kept trying to help him, but he hated that I thought he needed it. He wanted to be left alone. And I realized the only way that I could really help him was to give him what he wanted."

"I don't think he wants to be alone anymore," Hannibal muses. "Just that he deserves to be."

"Well, I hope you can convince him otherwise. Just don't do what I did, Hannibal. He doesn't want a therapist."

"Trust me, I know. He's quite protective of his mental health. And rightly so."

"I just... feel a little responsible. For both of you. Even knowing that you're grown men who don't need a referee. I don't want Will to be unhappy, and I don't want him to make you unhappy."

"Alana…" They both are already. But Hannibal is loath to mention it. She's, as she said, the type to feel responsible. He considers the next words. "Whatever happens between Will and

I... it isn't your fault. He made it plain to me at the start that it wouldn't be easy."

She sighs. "I know."

He finally lets her go with a few murmured intentions to have lunch soon, but the conversation is still on his mind. Will did tell him. It's him that had persisted regardless. Was it simply stubbornness, or is it as Alana suggested - is he trying to be a therapist?

The phone is still in his hand. Hannibal searches out a familiar name in the phone book and calls.

She answers with a pleased exclamation of his name. "Hannibal! It has been ages."

"So it has, Mischa. Tell me what you can see."

"The doors to my terrace. Santa Maria Novella is gleaming pink with the setting sun."

He closes his eyes, and he's beside her. It's almost close enough. "What have you been doing?"

"Today, I was at the market," she smiles. "Yesterday I am afraid I did not leave the studio."

"I'm very glad to hear it." He doesn't ask what she's working on. Unlike him, she is very private about her work generally. She will show him if she wishes.

"How's your new house?" Mischa asks.

"Improving with each renovation."

"What was it this week? Stained glass windows? An observatory?"

"Light fixtures," Hannibal says. "Including the most beautiful custom chandelier, Mischa."

"Describe it to me."

"Mid-century style fittings combined with antler sheds from Will's farm," Hannibal says idly.

"Will's farm. Am I meant to know where that is?"

"No, I wouldn't think so," he says dryly. "Will's my contractor."

"I see." She says it like their uncle, clipped and measuring, but it has a warmth to it. Hannibal smiles.

"It was an inspired choice for the room," he tells her. "I must send you photos."

"Please do. I always love your decorating."

"You'll love the planters Will made, too. The dining room is as beautiful as the kitchen now."

Mischa's answering hum is amused. Hannibal can see her in the copper Florence night, blonde hair made amber by the sinking sun. "Has Will been around a lot then, Hannibal?"

Ah. She's finding him transparent. "Yes," he murmurs.

"I haven't heard you mention anyone in a long time."

"Surely I mention friends often."

"Anyone new," she corrects easily.

"Will is my contractor, thus he postdates my new house."

Mischa is much less patient than Hannibal. "You're prone to pedantry when you're feeling unhappy, do you know that?"

He doesn't deny it. "Pedantry offers an implied amount of control over our shared mental environments."

"It cordons off areas. If you didn't want to talk about it, all you needed to do was say so."

He doesn't know if he wants to talk about it. But he called her for a reason. Not least because she's the only person in his life who he's loved so unreservedly. That line of thought holds his attention for a moment as he wonders why he's made that particular connection.

"Hannibal..." Mischa says, softly. "What's wrong?"

"I've done something foolish," he tells her.

"That doesn't sound like you. Tell me about it."

"I met a man who doesn't believe he's capable of relationships, and I started one with him," he sighs.

"Sounds like he's not exceptionally bright, then."

"I think you mean I am not," Hannibal corrects.

"How long have you been seeing him?"

"Since he finished my kitchen, more or less."

"So a few weeks?" He makes a noise of agreement. "It doesn't sound like it's too late to extricate yourself."

Hannibal sighs. "I suppose not."

"You don't want to, do you."

It’s not a question. He sucks at the inside of his lower lip. "I believe he is the kind of person I need in my life."

"I trust you," she replies.

"That's the problem. I'm not sure he does." He'd seemed to, bent practically in half in Hannibal's bed, begging for him to fill him up - but Hannibal knows already that Will's mistrust is lodged in different places than sex or intimacy. It's centered directly around his gorgeous mind.

"If he doesn't trust you, then he must have his reasons. He doesn't owe you trust. Or easiness. Surely if you think he's so important, you can be patient."

"I'm trying," he sighs, knowing she's right.

"You're patient in everything except the things you should be," she chastises mildly. "Snail gardens and clay roasts and burying dead things in the woods to find the bones later. Bury his bones, Hannibal."

He takes a long breath, seeing her honeycomb eyes through the steady sound of her voice. It brings to mind childhoods spent running through French countryside; climbing trees and collecting feathers. He remembers that she often annoyed him with her honest, simple cleverness as a child. Occasionally, she still does now.

"All right."

"Bury them deep and mark the spot with a white stone," she says, a bit softer. She remembers too.

He smiles. "All right, little Mischa. I'll try."

"Who are you calling little?" she teases.

"Still you, after all this time."

He can practically hear her smile. "I love you, Hanni."

He dislikes the abbreviation. It doesn't bother him when it's her. "And I you. Take care of yourself."

"Send me pictures of your house," she reminds him.

"Send me pictures of Florence."

"Always."

They bid farewell and hang up. Hannibal has work to do this afternoon. He wanders past one of Mischa's paintings on his way to his office. A human skull carefully rendered in oils. He touches the canvas gently, and smiles.

"The hubris of a young man," he says, remembering what she'd said when she gave it to him. He misses her fiercely. But she's flourishing in Italy, in a way he never quite could.

*

Another couple of days go by before Hannibal is struck again by the stomach-dropping derailment Will usually throws him into. He's prepping for his first class of the day, projector set up and his reading aids set into neat piles, when his phone goes off on the desk with a message.

He never used to bring it into his classroom. Mischa has been sending him photos lately, though. He picks the phone up and sees it's from Will and immediately prepares himself for cancellations, for excuses, for *It's not you it's me.*

Maybe Mischa was right, but patience is a wrench. He clicks open the text.

<<Hey. Is it just me or does Friday seem months away? Hope you're ok.>>

He has to take a breath. Trust Will to spring casual sweetness on him when he's been silent for two days.

>>I am certainly looking forward to it more than my lectures,<< Hannibal replies.

<<Good to hear. I've been learning to make pasta. Turns out this cooking thing is harder than it looks.>>

Hannibal smiles, unreasonably touched. *>>I'm sure you're doing splendidly.<<*

<<Wait to taste before you decide.>>

Hannibal bites his lip at the thought. *>>I have every faith in you*.<<

He sits the phone down and looks away. He doesn't let himself look at it again until after his morning classes. When he does, there's a picture message attached: some upsettingly proportioned pasta and a few dogs hopefully crowded by the counter.

He bites his lip against a smile. This new flippancy is almost too much. He immediately wants more.

>>Perhaps a press would yield better results. And more oil.<<

<<Sounds like I need to wait for the master chef.>>

>>Flattery will get you at least a pasta press.<<

<<At least?>>

>>At least.<< Hannibal licks his lips.

<<I can definitely do that. Did I mention I can't stop thinking about your hands?>>

"Will," Hannibal murmurs aloud. He hits call without much thought on the matter.

"Hannibal," Will murmurs.

"Hello, Will. How are you?"

"Better now."

Hannibal swallows. "I'm just on lunch at the university. How's your culinary adventure going?"

"Some success. Would be better with company."

"The pasta?"

"I'm not sure company can help the pasta."

"No, you may be right."

Will laughs. Hannibal has missed the sound. "Sorry about the text barrage, anyway. I've got a day off but so far it's been mostly talking to dogs and eating horrible pasta."

"It's lovely to hear from you," Hannibal replies.

"I swear it wasn't just because the dogs got boring."

Hannibal chuckles. "Naturally."

"I'm serious. I was thinking about Friday - well, I was thinking about Saturday. Uhm - I mean. Well."

"What do you mean?" Hannibal asks, amused.

He hears Will take a breath. "Do you have plans for the rest of the day on Saturday?"

"Not at all. The day is ours."

"I have a boat I've been working on," Will says, a little sheepishly, "and I guess I wondered if you wanted to uh - help me test it out."

"Will," Hannibal says, pleased, "I'd love to."

"Really? It won't be too much, the Friday afternoon as well? I know your time is precious, Doctor."

"All the more reason to spend it with someone I enjoy being with."

Will sounds relieved. "Okay - great. There's a lake - it's a bit of a drive but y'know, not too far."

"Perhaps we can prepare a lunch together."

That makes Will laugh again - he's in uncharacteristically good humor. "I imagine there'll be pasta left."

Hannibal really has to save this pasta batch. "I'm concerned at how much you've really made, Will."

"I may have doubled the recipe in case it wasn't enough."

Hannibal can't help it. He laughs too.

"My Da always taught me not to waste food," Will continues mournfully, "but goddamnit, I can't eat this much pasta in a week."

"Oh, Will," Hannibal says fondly.

"I'm gonna have to force some of it on my neighbors. There's a farm not far from here, the owners are old, so I don't think they'll be able to catch me if I hand them a pasta salad and then run away, right?"

"Do they own a shotgun?" Hannibal asks innocently.

Will cracks. "My god, maybe-"

"I'd take care who you foist salads onto," Hannibal intones.

"I've outrun farmers with shotguns before. I'm confident I can do it again now, twenty years on. There's not even a barbed wire fence around the Combs's."

Hannibal laughs. "Then you'll be fine."

"If you don't hear from me before Friday, just know I did this for you."

"How touching."

Will sighs as the laughter subsides. "Anyway. How's the rest of your week looking?"

"Even longer now."

"Well, you know where I am if you wanna talk." It's a fairly clear invitation. Perhaps Will is trying his hand at more than casual. *Bury his bones*, Hannibal hears his sister say.

"Likewise, Will."

"Maybe next time it won't be a pasta crisis."

"I hope not."

He's still thinking about Will's mention of his hands. "How's your shoulder?"

"It's been better."

"My offer is always there."

"Twice a day for the rest of my life? I remember."

Hannibal fantasizes about it sometimes. He doesn't think Will means to be cruel by bringing it up. "Or just as often as you see fit."

"Don't tempt me."

"Maybe I want to."

"You have to know by now that having you as my masseuse is not going to help my shoulder any." Will sounds amused.

"I'm sensing that you are correct, but it doesn't really change how I feel."

"And how do you feel, Doctor?"

"I'd love to be your masseuse."

Will's voice hitches a bit. "Good."

"What are you thinking?" Hannibal murmurs.

"I'm thinking about Monday."

"Which part?"

"I was thinking of how you looked when you were fucking me."

Hannibal breathes in. "What else, Will?"

"How you felt." He sounds like he can't quite believe he's saying these things. "I got off thinking about it. First time that's happened for a while."

"Is that so." His breath catches a bit.

"Yeah, it is."

Hannibal finds himself smiling. "Good."

Will's silence feels somehow shy. "Sorry - was that-?"

"Too much? No."

"Good... I'm glad. I uh - I should let you get on with lunch, right?"

"Sadly." He pauses, fingering the edge of his briefcase. "May I call you again later?"

"Yeah, I'd like that." Will sounds shy.

"Excellent, as would I. Have a good afternoon, Will."

Will wishes him luck with his office hours and then hangs up. Hannibal grins foolishly at his phone.

*

The rest of the day passes easily enough. He finds himself at home and at rather a loose end after dinner is cooked and eaten and the dishes are done. Finally, he picks his phone up. He calls Will again.

He doesn't answer right away, and when he does, his voice is soft. "Mm, hello?"

"Will, hello. Is this a good time?"

"Hannibal, hi! Yeah, it's - god, don't laugh, I fell asleep watching cooking shows."

"I don't believe sleep osmosis is the recommended method," Hannibal says gently.

"I think the fact they're sending me to sleep is a bad sign."

"Perhaps you're tired."

"Doctor, you're a genius."

"Is that sarcasm, Will?" Hannibal's lips twitch.

"From me? Never."

Hannibal listens to his dry little laugh with pleasure. "Go back to what we were discussing earlier, then."

"Oh, you wanna talk about that, huh? What do you want to know, Hannibal?"

"Absolutely anything you'd like to share," Hannibal teases.

"Hm, you're gonna have to be more specific."

"Tell me how you like to touch yourself, then."

He senses Will's shyness again with the little puff of his breath. "Uhm - usually I don't, often. But - yesterday I was just... I could still feel you."

Hannibal makes an encouraging noise.

"I have a vibrator that... works for me."

"Yes?"

"Am I the only person participating in show and tell today, Doctor?"

"No, I fully intend to reciprocate."

"That's encouraging." He hears Will take a breath. "I knew I was going to do it. I'd been thinking about you all day - every time I moved I could feel where you'd been. I started out just touching myself, y'know. Thinking about you."

"It felt good?" Hannibal murmurs.

"Yeah. Not quite enough though. I knew the vibrator would get me wetter."

Hannibal's tongue trails the edges of his teeth. He can feel himself filling out at Will's words. "Tell me how you used it."

"Uh...along the shaft of my cock, right above the head. Slower that way." He sighs audibly. "I teased myself. Got close and then made myself stop until I was so wet I could feel it on the sheets."

Hannibal sighs. "Did you use your fingers?"

"Yeah. Yeah, I did."

"Do you like that? I know I like having my fingers in you."

Will makes a soft noise and it goes right to Hannibal's gut. "I like yours more than mine."

Hannibal hums. "The feeling is mutual."

"I don't always prefer it like - the way we did Monday," Will breathes, "but I do like the soreness."

Eyes closing to hold in the mental images, Hannibal reaches for the edge of a bookcase to steady himself. "Are you touching yourself now, Will?"

"I-" Will's voice cracks. "Not yet."

"Would you like to?"

"Yes," he gasps.

"Good, I'd like you to. Touch yourself for me, Will."

"Keep talking to me," Will pleads.

"Of course. Tell me what you're doing. Where you are." He wants to see it.

"In bed," Will sighs. "I'm just touching through... through my boxers."

"Does it feel good?"

"Yeah. I like hearing you."

"I will give you any words you wish, Will."

"Just give me ones that help me imagine you right now."

"I'm in my study, standing by the hearth. I... may need to sit now."

Will laughs softly. "You sound so dignified, and this is... sort of dirty, Hannibal."

"'Sort of'? I shall have to finesse my technique."

"Finesse away." Will sounds breathy, like his fingers are still moving. Hannibal lowers himself into his office chair.

"Keep touching yourself," he says as a gentle reminder.

"Don't gotta tell me twice."

Hannibal loves it when his accent curls slow like this. "Good. Take your shorts down for me."

Will hums a response, and Hannibal hears rustling. "Okay. Done. Now you."

Hannibal huffs and unbuttons his fly.

"Get hard for me," Will purrs.

"Nearly there."

"Good. Like thinking about you like this."

"Losing control?" Hannibal takes a deep breath as he pulls his cock free.

"Is that what you're doing? I just like the thought of you touching yourself and thinking of me."

"It's not the first time I've done that."

"Oh fuck, really-?"

"Since you seem so enamored of the idea, then no, it is not."

"Tell me about the first time."

"The first time I gave you a massage, perhaps."

"Perhaps? Sounds like there might have been a few repeat offences, Doctor."

"I'm not sure how unflattering a picture I wish to paint. It's not something I've felt the need to indulge in often... before we met."

"God, I really like knowing that."

Hannibal licks his lips. "Good."

"What're you doing now?" Will asks.

"Just stroking myself," he murmurs.

"Me too. I'm - I'm wet, god."

"Good," Hannibal praises. He's working his own cock slowly now, attention held by Will's little breaths down the line. "It's always more pleasant to picture you touching me while I do this."

"I'm finding the thought of that pretty pleasant too." Will sighs. "I can't wait to fuck you."

Hannibal hisses out a little groan and squeezes himself. "Likewise, Will."

"Keep talking," Will begs.

"What would you like to hear , love?"

"Anything." Will makes a strained little noise.

Hannibal closes his eyes. "Your hands are gorgeous," he murmurs. "Every time you touch me I want to feel your calluses on my tenderest skin."

"I will touch you wherever you want me to."

"I want them inside me."

"Whenever you want. Until you can't take anymore."

Hannibal would like to draw it out. "That could be a long time."

"That's okay, Hannibal."

He leans back in his chair at the sound of Will's voice wrapping around his name. His hand moves a fraction faster on his cock. "Sitting in my chair like this, I can't help but picture you riding me," he murmurs.

Will's little moan makes his jaw clench. "Yeah? That can be arranged."

"Good, I - good. How do you feel now, Will?"

"I'm wondering if it'd be ill-advised to drive in this state."

"I think that depends if you get dressed first." Hannibal tamps down on a swell of hopefulness.

"Pros and cons to that I guess."

Hannibal sighs and tips his head back. "Oh, Will."

"Jesus. I'm going to drive to Baltimore, aren't I?"

"Are you?"

"If you want me to."

He closes his eyes. "More than anything."

The sound of rustling. Will laughs. "I'll be there as fast as I can, god."

Hannibal breathes out. "Be safe."

"I promise. Bye." The line goes dead.

Hannibal looks down at himself and weighs the situation. He's ignored more insistent physical sensations, it's true. He sighs and zips himself away with a grimace. Then he goes to the kitchen for another glass of wine. He'll pour Will a scotch when he’s closer. They might both need it, to calm down.

To wind down the time, Hannibal takes a shower and changes into his nightwear. His erection has gone down, but not the wound-up feeling in his gut. This isn't sex to avoid tension, at least. Unsurprisingly, he much prefers it this way.

He sits at the harpsichord, playing idly until he hears Will's truck crunch into the driveway. He waits for the knock to go and answer the door to him. Then he can barely get it closed again before Will has him against a wall.

He's showered too, by the smell of him; by the slight dampness lingering in his hair. He kisses Hannibal deep and savoring, pressing their bodies together. Hannibal wraps him in an embrace, hands sinking into his curls and holding him there. Will groans softly against his mouth.

"I poured you a drink," Hannibal murmurs.

Will steps back, but instead of heading to the kitchen he drops down to his knees in front of Hannibal. Hannibal's breath stutters.

"Okay?" Will asks, leaning in to touch his stomach, fingers skimming under the hem of his shirt.

"Yes," Hannibal gasps.

Will flashes him a grin and leans in to kiss his stomach as he starts to roll the waistband of his pajama pants. Hannibal sets his palms against the wall. The sight of Will stroking his cock before he tongues him into his mouth is something he's not sure he'll ever get tired of. He's so intent. So visibly affected, tucking a hand down the front of his own jeans while he sucks Hannibal deep.

"Don't make me come," Hannibal warns him.

Eyes flicking up to meet his, Will pulls back enough to whirl his tongue around the tip of his cock.

"Cruel," Hannibal murmurs.

"You said-" he laps against the slit, taking his time, " - not to make you come."

"And you tease instead." He bites his lip as Will goes back to long, slow sucks, humming in agreement. Hannibal strokes through the curls at his temples. "The things you do to me," he whispers.

Will finally pulls off. "I want to do so many more."

"I'm at your disposal, Will."

"Where were you sitting just now?" Will whispers, looking up at him.

"Before you arrived? Or during our conversation?"

"During."

"The study."

"I wasn't kidding about that chair."

Hannibal breathes out. "Very well."

Will rights his clothing carefully and then stands and follows him to the study. Hannibal considers a moment, then pushes his pajama pants down before he seats himself in his chair. Will's face grows beatific with his delight. He strips off his shirt with a grin.

"Keep going," Hannibal murmurs.

"As you wish." He goes for his jeans next, grinning at Hannibal as he drops them to the floor. He slinks over to Hannibal and lets himself be tugged close.

When he sinks into Hannibal's lap, they both sigh.

"You need to take this off," he says, tugging at Hannibal's sweater. When he does, Will leans in to kiss his throat. Hannibal smooths his hands greedily over his skin while he shifts into position. When Will presses down and down, a low groan escaping him. He feels like fire; like he was made to fit in Hannibal's arms this way. He's wet and startlingly hot when Hannibal sinks into him. His moan vibrates through Hannibal's palm on his back.

"Is it what you wanted?"

"Fuck, yes," Will sighs.

"You look so gorgeous in my lap, darling."

Will rolls his hips with a sigh. "You look gorgeous beneath me."

Hannibal tips his face up and gets a slow kiss in return. He's breathless from Will's movements; sweet, easy slides of their skin. "You feel even better than you look."

"You look exactly as incredible as you feel."

They kiss again, hands in hair and Will's hips rolling. His quick breaths match the beat of his body. Hannibal closes his eyes to feel them come together. "Come for me."

"Workin' on it," Will pants softly.

"Keep working, love."

"How about you do a little work and touch me?"

Hannibal smiles against his neck. "Gladly."

He slips his hand between them. Will is so warm and slick, he barely has to move it. He groans softly against Hannibal's mouth.

"Love your hands."

"Mm, I'm glad. You feel so wet for me, is it good?"

Will gives the rough chuckle that means he's embarrassed. "Eh, give it six outta ten-" Hannibal pinches him gently. "Christ," Will bites his jaw in revenge, "yes it's good." When Hannibal drags his nails gently down Will's back, he straightens as if stricken, jaw dropping and hips pulsing forward harder. He makes a low, continuous noise in his throat. "Oh fuck that's good - Hannibal..."

Hannibal does it again, tucking his face against Will's throat. He circles wet fingers faster over Will's cock, hissing softly at the clench of his body. Will's fingers are tight on his shoulders, pace growing urgent. The sounds of their skin are punctuated by his rough, low vocalizations. Hannibal can't get enough. He's flushed with pride at having brought Will to that point; like this, riding out every swell of his arousal, he wants to feel him come. He rubs him gentle and fast and feels the first long clench as Will starts to come around his cock. His fingers bite in even more.

"Oh God," he gasps, stuttering on another pulse. "Fuck, Hannibal, fuck-"

"It's all right," Hannibal strokes from his nape down his back, keeping him close as he strokes the last shivers of it out of him. "Good boy," he whispers. "Beloved boy, just feel it."

Will grips his hair and finally stills, breaths rushed. Hannibal closes his eyes and rests his forehead against Will's cheek.

"Gimme a second," Will whispers.

"Take what you need."

Will nuzzles their cheeks together and sighs. "God. That was. Mm."

"Worth the drive?"

"It will be when I get to use what I brought," Will whispers playfully.

Hannibal bites his lip. "And what's that, Will?"

"If you want to see, we should go upstairs.” It doesn't take much more persuasion than that. When Will steps off him to grab his bag, Hannibal picks up their clothes and follows him up the stairs.

"I didn't even see you bring your bag in," he comments, looking at the backpack curiously.

"You were a little distracted."

"I was up against the wall," he says dryly.

"That's exactly what I said." Hannibal gives him an amused look, pausing. Will slaps him lightly on the hip. "Up. Stairs."

Hannibal goes.

In the bedroom, Will stretches where he's stood, lean and still gorgeously naked. He leans in to kiss Hannibal.

"Wanna lie down for me?"

Hannibal obeys. He's still hard, but endlessly patient for Will. He rewards him by wrapping a hand around him and stroking for a few long moments before he unfastens his bag. As he rummages, Hannibal squeezes the base of his cock lightly, rapt. The harness Will takes out is simple and utilitarian, but Hannibal expected nothing less.

He pauses and studies Hannibal teasingly.

"Need a hand?" Hannibal grins.

Will tosses him the bag instead. "Need you to choose."

Hannibal peers inside and barely stifles his mirth at the small collection of sex toys. "Gladly."

He watches Will stand to step into the harness, hips arching minutely at the sight. Will watches him right back. Wrenching himself back to the task at hand, Hannibal takes a box out of the bag and opens it up.

"Always the right tool for the job," Hannibal murmurs.

"Handy, you might say."

"Oh, I would."

Will laughs and kneels on the bed so that Hannibal can help him fit the cock he's chosen into the harness. Hannibal strokes him gently as he fits it with a condom, too.

"Don't distract me," Will chastises, without heat.

"Give me something else to do, then."

"Pass me some lube."

Hannibal stretches for it. Will's hands are steady as he takes it and slicks his hands. He wraps one around the base of Hannibal's cock and strokes gently with his thumb as the other trails down between his thighs.

Hannibal lets his thighs fall loose. Will watches his face as he gently rubs. "Ready?"

"Yes, please."

"So polite." He kisses Hannibal's knee as he settles, starting to twist in with one slick tip.

"Politeness has always served me well." He's a little breathless. Will gives him more, slowly and steadily as he did the first time, though it's different now he can see the desire in his face. He's unable to look away, and soon enough, Will is stroking into him with three fingers and Hannibal can't hold back his harsh breaths. Will looks flushed as well.

"I'm ready," Hannibal tells him softly.

Will licks his lips and nods. He wraps and slicks the toy and then his hands settle on Hannibal's hips. "Comfy?"

Hannibal nods back. He loves the way Will handles him into position, nudging his knees up against his flanks and cradling his hip as he lines up. Hannibal loves him when he's bossy, but also when he's sweet.

He kisses Hannibal, hand positioning the toy and hips pushing forward. Hannibal bears up for the blunt stretch of his cock with a groan. Both their faces show the same shock of pleasure. Easing slowly in, Will keeps his eyes on where they join, going gentle.

"It's perfect," Hannibal murmurs.

"Good. Tell me what's good, okay?" He starts to move in slow, smooth circles, head bowed and breaths steady.

His concentration is immense. So are the sensations Hannibal feels. A noise escapes him, weak and low. Will's eyes flash to his. He glides his hands up to the back of Hannibal's knees and applies gentle pressure, sliding deeper with the next roll of his hips. Hannibal offers no resistance. He wants nothing held back. He breathes Will's name as he starts to move in earnest. His knows his tone is soft, full of wonder.

"God, you're something," Will says softly.

He knows what he wants to be, truly. He arches his hips up and grips at Will's waist to pull him faster. "Please, Will."

"Yeah, I got you." The joining of their bodies turns more urgent. Hannibal cries out under his breath. Will's hands soothe him and pull him closer. They touch foreheads, breathing one another's air.

"You feel so good," Hannibal tells him.

"Good. You look incredible. Think you can come like this?" Will adds. Hannibal groans on another deep push of his hips before he nods fast. "Tell me when," Will murmurs.

"Faster," is all Hannibal can say in reply. He's tensed all over, aching with arousal. Will's movements are nudging the spot inside him that makes his feet arch where they hover near Will’s shoulders. Smiling, Will kisses his ankle before urging his legs up over them, knees snug against his collarbones. The shift in angle has Hannibal tipping his head back against the pillows with a harsh exhale.

"Good," Will breathes. He grins when Hannibal grips his hair and fucks him faster. "Let go, Hannibal," he murmurs into his ear.

It's impossible not to, not when he's overwhelmed by Will over him and inside him. He closes his eyes and holds on. His orgasm comes in long, static waves, harder than it has any right to be when he hasn't even touched himself. It doesn't matter; it's Will. Will who's kissing his neck with hands gentle on his chest, talking soft to him as he comes down from it, still dribbling come onto his own belly.

He pulls out before Hannibal feels the need to squirm, curling beside him to keep touching him. Grateful, he lets himself be held, breathing slowing to keep pace with Will's. Will kisses his cheek. Hannibal smiles and touches his arm gently.

"May I -" his fingers go to the harness straps.

Will stretches and lifts his hips to let him slide it down his thighs.

Hannibal is careful when he sets it aside, and he lets his fingers creep slowly back up one of Will’s pale thighs as they kiss slow and thorough, creeping to his cock to circle delicately over the head with his thumb as their tongues touch. He can’t help smiling when Will gasps, hips juddering a little. Can’t stop marveling at how wet he still is.

"I love fucking you," Will murmurs.

"Good, you can do it again later.”

"Mm, sounds good." He strokes down Hannibal's chest, smearing the mess on his belly absently.

Hannibal keeps stroking too. He doesn't think Will was expecting more. He just - can't stop himself.

"Jesus, Hannibal," Will sighs. He arches for his fingers and tucks his face against his shoulder with a whine.

"All right?"

"Just sensitive - it's... it's good though."

Hannibal kisses his temple and keeps stroking softly. He adores the soft, subvocal sounds Will makes, like he's not used to letting himself feel good. Like he's afraid to be loud. But they're all alone here, and he can be as loud as he wishes. Considering it, Hannibal suddenly smiles.

"You brought the vibrator that you like."

"I did," Will gulps.

"May I use it?"

Will breathes out. "Yes."

Kissing him again gently, Hannibal pulls away briefly to retrieve the box. Will holds still until he returns, quivering slightly. When Hannibal gently sets the head of the wand against him and switches it on, it intensifies.

"Jesus," he breathes.

Hannibal can't help but let his delight show. Will's knowing look is somewhat spoiled by the way his eyelids dip at the sensations.

"Fuck," he hisses, arching when Hannibal circles the toy over his cock.

"How does that feel?"

"Nnnn - ah-" is all Will manages.

"I want to see you come again," Hannibal whispers in his ear.

Will grips his shoulders and nods, panting softly now, jaw slacking. Hannibal nips lightly at his jawline. He keeps his movements slow and controlled, sighing in content when Will’s own hand comes to steady the wand in place.

Will's hips lift up into his hand, the encompassing buzz of the toy between them. A groan bleeds out of him, his fingers digging into the meat of Hannibal's shoulder. Hannibal thinks smugly of bruises and keeps the toy pulsing against him while teasing with his fingertips just below it.

"Fuck, yes, please," Will chokes on the words.

Hannibal slips one inside him, rubbing his sensitive skin. Will cries out and tightens, hips bucking, the broad muscles in his arms bunching as he draws close. Hannibal drinks him in, watching his head drop back and his throat work on weak words. It's Hannibal's name, broken into beautiful pieces. Hannibal kisses the divot of his collarbones and works his fingers faster. Will flicks his chin, bites off a groan, and comes.

Hannibal moans softly as he feels it. He's as enraptured by the sight as ever.

Will's breathing is loud when Hannibal switches off the toy. He makes a little noise when Hannibal sets it to join the harness at the edge of the bed, curling into his body as soon as Hannibal is back against him. Hannibal runs his fingers through his hair and lets him press close. For a while, all either of them do is breathe. Then, Will laughs softly.

Hannibal makes an inquiring noise.

"I feel like a teenager, I haven't driven in the dark to get laid for a long time."

"I'm glad you did."

"Me too," Will promises, winding his arms tight round Hannibal's back.

"Will you stay?" Hannibal murmurs.

"I'll have to leave early for the dogs," Will says, apologetic but earnest.

"Of course. I can at least have coffee ready."

Will hums softly. "Sounds good." He leans up and kisses Hannibal's cheek. "Let's clean up, and then maybe we could sleep?"

"Yes. Let's." Hannibal sits up and offers Will a hand. He takes himself off to the bathroom to clean up quickly while Will gathers himself. When he's done, Hannibal turns on the shower. This, he'd like them to do together. He opens the door and beckons Will in.

Will smiles a bashful smile and joins him. Under the water, Hannibal can't help but study him while he's naked and simply stood, eyes closed against the stream. He takes up the soap to wash them both. Will steps close and leans their foreheads together, sighing against his mouth.

"That feels so good."

Hannibal rubs over his chest in careful circles with the suds smoothing the way. "You don't usually let people touch you, do you Will?" He says quietly.

"Not if I can help it."

"You like it though."

"When it's you."

Hannibal tries very hard not to let that influence his ego too much. It's a difficult venture, especially said with melting blue eyes caressing his face.

"An honor rarely bestowed, I imagine."

Will looks away, flushing. "Yeah all right."

Hannibal tilts his face back up to kiss him again. It earns him a sigh. He sighs back, making sure all the soap is rinsed off of Will's face. Will blushingly returns the favor before they get out. Hannibal lends Will a toothbrush and leaves him while he goes to find him something to wear. He leaves the extra pajama pants and a soft tee shirt folded at the foot of the bed and hangs or deposits his own into the laundry.

After a few minutes Will emerges in his towel, smiling shyly. He sees the clothing and softly says, "thanks."

"No problem. Ready for bed, or would you like a drink? Either the Scotch you disregarded earlier, or perhaps tea?"

"Bed would be nice."

"All right." He pulls the rumpled under sheet off and goes to grab a replacement from the linen closet in the bathroom, amused by the sight of the toys they'd used sat drying innocuously on the edge of his sink, washed and treated. Thanks to his meticulous boy. He is fond even of this.

Back in the bedroom, Will gallantly helps him fit the clean sheet despite being clearly baffled by the complex corners Hannibal tucks. He does fairly well. When they finally slide into bed, Hannibal is rewarded by Will rolling straight into his arms. He takes the weight gladly.

"I had a really... I'm glad I came over," Will says, words muffled in Hannibal's chest.

"As am I." He turns off the bedside light and then strokes through the smooth damp strands of Will's hair, eyes drifting shut. He's determined to just enjoy this.

Will's breaths steadily even out against his skin. Hannibal appreciates his trust, and comfort. Even if it's short lived. He tries not to wonder about tomorrow as he drifts off.

His dreams are full of Will as well. Things he wants to cherish but can't quite remember when he wakes up. It's early but Will is already stirring. He'd pulled away in the night but now he curls close to Hannibal in the dim light, blinking slowly. Hannibal just blinks back, letting him move.

"Sorry if I woke you at all," he says hoarsely, "bad dreams sometimes."

"No, I slept well. I'm sorry if you didn't."

"It's not your fault. Just how it is." He rubs his eyes. "Hangover from working homicide for so long."

Hannibal leans in for a tentative kiss. He's relieved when Will kisses back, before sighing and settling close again. It's early enough that he thinks a bit more sleep wouldn't hurt either of them.

He strokes Will's hair back gently. "Another hour, Will?"

Will hums. "All right." He tucks his face up against Hannibal's neck. His content little sounds send Hannibal back into a smiling doze.

A while passes, and he feels Will stir again. This time he presses a kiss to Hannibal's shoulder before sliding out from under the covers.

Hannibal bites his lip and watches him start to get dressed with heavy lids. When Will slips into the bathroom, Hannibal pulls on a robe and goes downstairs to make him coffee. He's got some pastries from the freezer heating up by the time Will comes downstairs too, still looking half asleep. He's holding his bag, but he sets it aside when Hannibal hands him a mug.

"Thank you," he says gratefully, sitting down to take a sip, closing his eyes. When he opens them, he looks around the kitchen. "Everything still all right in here?"

"It's perfect, really." Hannibal gets down some plates and sets the bar for breakfast.

Will ducks his head in acknowledgement and smiles when breakfast is served. "Thank you."

They're both quiet - Hannibal not least because he is still sleepy - but it's not uncomfortable. Neither of them are morning people, it seems.

Will looks up from his pastry after a minute and quietly asks, "How are you feeling?"

"Very well, thank you," Hannibal says, smiling pleasantly.

"I'm glad to hear that."

Hannibal leans and kisses him gently. "And you, Will?"

"Good," Will says. Hannibal might be imagining the air of vague surprise. He smiles and gives him another croissant. He'll feed him as much as he can before he leaves. He has a feeling Will barely remembers to feed himself when he's left to his own devices.

When they're done eating, he pours the rest of the coffee into a thermos to send home with Will, and walks him to the door. Will gives him a faint smile, hugging it against his chest.

"So see you Friday?"

"Hopefully I will talk to you before then," Hannibal replies quietly.

Will leans and kisses him. It feels like something real. "Call me anytime. Thanks for breakfast."

"Any time," Hannibal echoes, watching him smile at his shoes as he walks back to his truck.

He waits until he's started the engine before he closes the door over, and sighs. It already feels like a dream. Perhaps back to bed again, he thinks, so he might visit it again.

In the end, it's exactly what he does.

*

He does hear from Will again before Friday, and it's a pleasant enough distraction until the day arrives. He dresses as casually as he cares to before driving to Virginia. It's a beautiful day, crisp and bright. He anticipates Will's pleasure at the sunshine.

When he arrives at the farmhouse, the dogs are lounging on and around the porch and the front door is wedged open.

"Hello," he calls.

Winston regards him curiously, the others rising to greet him as he steps onto the edge of the threshold. Finally, Will appears in the doorway of his workshop-come-barn, wiping himself down.

"Hi!"

"Will, good to see you. Have you been making something new?"

"Just laminating for now." He smiles in greeting, kissing Hannibal's cheek as soon as he's climbed the steps before going inside. "Would you like a drink?"

"I'm perfectly fine if you'd rather start our walk."

"Sure. Lemme grab my things." He smiles again. Two in as many minutes; truly Hannibal is fortunate today. He waits agreeably with the dogs.

Will isn't long, and he's actually humming softly under his breath, which is strangely charming. Hannibal thinks it might be Johnny Cash. He soon stops, but the melody spins into another in Hannibal's mind, keeping time with their feet as they walk into the fields.

Will strips off his overshirt in the heat and Hannibal peeks none-too-subtly at his arms. Will definitely sees him doing it, at least if his smirk is anything to go by. But he just whistles to a dog to keep up.

The fields stretch into forests that are cool and dim despite the sunlight. Will throws sticks for the dogs, and after a while they grow bored and he hangs back to lace his fingers with Hannibal's idly. Hannibal, as whenever Will touches him, feels a small thrill burst behind his breastbone.

"Heard from Mischa?" Will asks mildly.

"We spoke recently, yes. She sends me photos of her latest work on occasion. I suppose I must venture to Florence some time if I wish to see her."

"Sounds like a good enough excuse."

"Indeed. The house has been quite a distraction."

"I guess so." Will bites his lip.

Hannibal shrugs. "Perhaps the prospect will entice her to visit instead."

"Maybe you could just tell her if you want her to, and see where that gets you."

"Ah, the direct approach."

"It's not always the way, but if you miss her, maybe you should say so."

"I do," Hannibal assures him. "I always do."

"I just mean - it's okay just to ask for what you need."

Hannibal only wishes the words carried a double meaning. "I'll bear that in mind." He squeezes his fingers.

Will smiles at him again. "Not that I'm one to be giving life advice I guess."

"I welcome your input, Will."

Will raises his eyebrows at him. "Clever double entendre?"

Hannibal's lips twitch. "You could take it that way."

Will grins. He pauses, reaching out. "You've got a bit of something in your hair." He brushes it loose.

"The perils of nature," Hannibal sighs. It makes Will smile again, still dusting the last of whatever it was from his hair. Hannibal takes the hint– he hopes - and leans to kiss him.

It's soft and gentle. Will smells of fresh air and coffee. He seems as eager for it as Hannibal feels. He makes a noise of content and tips his nose against Hannibal's, staying close for a minute when the kiss breaks.

"Mm, that was as good as I've been imagining."

Hannibal laughs softly. "It's been two days."

"And I've been imagining it for both of them." Will stays close, then he seems to steel himself to pull away.

Hannibal keeps an arm around his waist. They walk through the trees together, dogs milling about. When they finally reach the bank of a stream, Will pauses. He gives Hannibal a little grin.

"This is my favorite fishing spot." His eyes go back to the water. "It's just so quiet. The water is almost black at certain times of day, but when the sun is out you can see right to the bottom. I found an arrowhead once."

"It's lovely."

Will nods. A couple of the dogs paddle amongst the reeds at the shallower run of the river.

"You're not fishing today?" Hannibal asks.

"I thought the sight of me in my waders might be too much for you to handle. And I fished yesterday. For dinner."

Hannibal smiles. He wouldn't mind the sight of Will in anything, honestly. He's surprised even at himself.

Will throws his shirt down on the grass and gestures. "Wanna sit? Or we can keep walking."

"I'd love to sit." He eases down gingerly onto the shirt and Will drops himself beside him. A dog or two noses around them before wandering off to sniff around the underbrush.

"Tell me about your week," Will says softly.

"The best part of it, you were present for."

"It's cheating for you to avoid my questions by flattering me, you know. Alana tells me off for pulling stuff like that."

"Oh, does she?"

"Regularly. Don't change the subject."

"I spoke to several gardeners, you'll be happy to hear."

"I am. Are they fitting you a pond?"

"Just a small one."

"Sounds nice. Need some patio furniture?"

"Are you offering to go shopping with me?"

"I was offering to build you some," Will laughs, "but sure, we can go shopping. You can get those plastic sets at Target."

"Now I know you're having me on."

"Not about building you some."

"You're hired."

"I'm not soliciting work," Will laughs.

"Aren't you?" Hannibal teases.

"No, I'm not." Will keeps smiling, but he starts to look a little defensive.

"Well, I'm not pushing."

"I just - wanted to build you some if you wanted some," Will looks down at the floor, picking at the grass, "as a - gift or whatever."

"Oh," Hannibal murmurs. "I would -" He looks out over the water, feeling the thrumming in his chest. "Nothing else would be half so good," he assures.

Will shrugs, apparently still a little embarrassed that Hannibal got the wrong idea. Hannibal is a bit, himself. He reaches out and touches the curls at the crown of Will's head. "Come here."

Obediently, Will leans in, eyes on Hannibal's. They kiss again slowly. Hannibal keeps the words he's thinking behind his lips. He does, however, get Will to lay on his back with his head in Hannibal's lap, their hands resting together on Will's chest. Hannibal ruffles his free hand through Will's curls. Will smiles crookedly and keeps his eyes closed.

"Tell me about your parents."

Hannibal takes a deep breath. "I don't remember them much, honestly. I remember my mother had dark hair and that she read a lot. My father was quiet, but from what I know now, they were both well-liked."

Will makes a thoughtful noise. "What about your uncle?"

"Also quiet. He's an artist, I'm not sure if I mentioned? He...wasn't prepared back then to take care of children, but we're closer now."

"How wasn't he prepared?"

"His house was like a jewel box of beautiful, fragile things. He slept until sundown and drank and painted all night." Hannibal smiles faintly into the distance.

"So who looked after you?"

"The staff, I suppose, and occasionally my aunt."

"Who... loved you?" Will murmurs. Hannibal looks down at him. He smiles.

"Mischa. My aunt and uncle were very generous, we wanted for nothing, but they didn't much know what to do with us until we got older."

"I can understand that. My dad -" Will sighs. Hannibal scritches his scalp gently to show that he wants to hear it. "He just never knew what to do with me. That made two of us."

"You weren't a problem to be solved, Will..."

"I was sometimes."

"Troublemaker?"

"Just unhappy." Hannibal strokes his forehead. Will smiles small. "Even I didn't know what was wrong for a long time. Just that it was."

Hannibal hums. They both watch one another. Hannibal tilts his head. "Your father, Will, did he love you, by your definition?"

Will squints up at him. "I hope you're not psychoanalyzing me right now."

"You asked me the same thing."

Will pauses. "True. And he did, I think, by his definition."

"What definition was that?"

"Provided for me. Taught me everything he knew, even though he knew it wouldn't be enough."

"Wouldn't be enough for what? To satisfy you?"

"To give me a good life," Will sighs. "We were always poor."

"You don't seem poor now. What he knew served you well."

"Eventually."

"And before that?"

"There's more than one way to be poor."

Hannibal closes his eyes. He hates the way Will's voice sounds, tight and ashamed. "I know," he replies softly.

Will's fingers press gently over Hannibal's on his chest. "You said it yourself. I'm fine now. More than." He looks up at Hannibal and gives him one of his most delicate smiles. He seems at least to earnestly believe it. Without a word, Hannibal bends to kiss him.

Will threads a hand through his hair to hold him down. Hannibal feels rich beyond compare.

He's not sure how long they kiss before a splash distracts them both. Buster, immersed in the water, probably chasing fish. Will laughs, watching the dogs play. After a moment, Winston breaks from the pack and comes to lie close to Will, back against his leg. Will sighs.

"This is nice. Have you got pins and needles yet?"

"Not quite yet, no." He smiles and strokes Will's hair again. It is nice. Nicer than he expected. Nicer than he thought Will might tolerate.

Will stretches out and doesn't protest when Hannibal touches under the hem of his shirt. He doesn't mean it to be suggestive, he just craves the softness of Will's skin. Even so, Will shivers a bit. Hannibal craves that too. He strokes gently, looking out over the water with an exhale of content. He'll enjoy it for as long as Will holds still for it.

At first his efforts are admirable, but after a while he squirms a little. Hannibal relents and hooks his fingers in Will's jeans pocket instead.

"Wanna head back soon?" Will asks.

"Whenever you're ready."

They disentangle after a few minutes and Will starts to do a headcount of the dogs. Hannibal hides his smile behind his hand. It takes Will quite a while to find everyone, but eventually they're on their way back. Hannibal trails along beside Will, sneaking looks at him.

"What are you thinking? Come on, spit it out," Will says gently.

"Will you let me cook with you?" Hannibal asks.

"Jesus, yes. I'll need all the help I can get."

"All right," Hannibal murmurs, pleased. He was hoping not to be abandoned on the porch with an iced tea. Will takes his hand again.

"I've been upstairs a couple of nights this week. Going to try and finish the floors."

"That sounds - good, Will."

"It might be nice not to sleep in my living room one day I guess."

"Undoubtedly. If you choose to."

"I’m working on it." He smiles faintly.

Hannibal squeezes his hand. They walk the rest in comfortable silence. Back at the house, Will wipes down dogs before he takes Hannibal's jacket and hangs it up. Hannibal steps out of his shoes and follows him to the kitchen.

He's slightly taken aback by the amount of pasta despite all warnings. Will sees him looking and grins bashfully.

"I see you've been perfecting your technique."

"Trying."

"Have you always pursued new hobbies to the point of obsession?"

"Yes, don't you?"

Hannibal chuckles. "Perhaps."

Will shrugs. "I wanted it to be right."

"I understand," Hannibal murmurs. He touches Will's elbow.

Will smiles a bit, but it's faintly embarrassed again. "I have - do you want a beer? Or wine? Maybe it's a little early, I don't know."

"Let's wash up and start prepping things. A glass of wine would go nicely with that."

Nodding, Will gets a bottle off a modest wine rack in his pantry and then opens the fridge to retrieve the accompaniments to... a lot of pasta. Hannibal pours wine and examines the shape of Will as he knows him. He can easily see how Will became such a prolific carpenter after leaving the force: his experiences as a teenager helping his father suddenly concentrated into an obsessive form of productivity. Forgetting to eat as well, until he cooks far too much, perhaps.

Considering this, Hannibal silently rolls up his sleeves to help while Will starts preparing the fish. Despite his claims at incompetence, he is astonishingly deft with a filleting knife. Hannibal gathers together the ingredients for a sauce and gets to work. He catches Will watching him as much as he is watching Will. They smile at one another. Will sips a beer every now and then, and when he's finished with the fish he rinses it and puts it back in the fridge.

"I better feed the dogs, or they'll never settle," he says, when he trips over a stray tail.

Hannibal, sauce simmering on the back burner, sits at the kitchen table and observes the process. Will has huge saucepan in the fridge that looks like it's used specifically for the purpose of making dog food. He takes it out onto the porch and the dogs all follow in a flurry of fur and tongues. There's a slight ruckus of bowls and then Will reappears. "You make it all yourself?" Hannibal asks.

"Had a couple of them get poisoned by dog food a while back, so I did it like this while they were getting better. They didn't want to go back to canned stuff, and I guess I decided it was safer this way anyway."

"That's terrible," Hannibal says. "I can understand that."

"Better to know it was my bad cooking, right?" Will smiles.

"There you go again, not giving yourself enough credit."

"Well, y'know." He goes to the sink to wash up, then gets out another saucepan for the pasta. Hannibal does not know, but he's sure Will does, at least in his head.

He starts to blanch greens while Will drops noodles into boiling water and adds the fish to the sauce. He grabs plates and a colander to drain everything. "I'll set the table."

Hannibal smiles to see him bustle around. He takes the liberty of plating up, so the pasta and fish don't overcook. Will smiles at the sight of it, probably fancier than he'd have done. He brings the wine and his beer to the table.

They seat themselves and take their first bites. "It's delicious," Hannibal says, and finds he isn't lying.

Will nods. "Pasta tastes better than it looks."

Hannibal chuckles. "Not bad for your sixteenth try."

Will smirks at him. "Rude."

"I was just going by the amount of pasta."

Will laughs. "Okay, fair." He sips his beer and looks at the open door where the dogs are all obediently sat at the threshold. "Think I could mix it into the dog food?"

"Possibly in moderation. I'll take some home with me," he adds.

Will laughs. "I don't think it's quite that good."

"I disagree. The fish is beautiful."

Will blushes. "I can't exactly take credit for that."

"Cooked beautifully too."

"You cooked it," Will chuckles.

Hannibal shrugs. "It was quick."

"Yeah. We make a good team."

"We do."

They smile at one another. Will pours Hannibal another glass of wine and opens up another beer. Outside the dark is falling and a faint chill is creeping into the house. After dinner, Will starts building a small fire just to take the edge off.

Hannibal watches his hands. He looks severe and beautiful with the flames flickering to life beneath his fingers like so many gods. Hannibal would believe it of him; a Green Man, like the Celtic myths. The thought pleases him so immensely he doesn't quite have time to stop smiling about it before Will looks at him. He immediately raises an eyebrow, which is somewhat less mythological.

"All right?"

"Yes, very well thank you."

Will goes back to the fire, adjusting the flue before getting back to his feet. Hannibal holds out a hand. Their fingers slot together. Will smiles.

"I have dessert for later, too."

"What is it?"

Will turns a bit pink. "Just - cake. I'm not super fancy."

Hannibal smiles. "Did you bake it?"

Will sighs, apparently expecting ridicule. "Yes, I baked it."

"Wonderful." Hannibal tugs him closer.

"It's clementine cake."

He noses into his temple, kisses it. "Sounds interesting."

"'Interesting' isn't usually a nice word to use about a cake."

"Stop nitpicking," Hannibal scolds gently. "I find food very interesting."

Will creases with laughter that shows off the little points of his canines. "Please, a man who regularly serves foie gras and pomegranate reductions cannot find a clementine cake interesting."

Hannibal decides there's nothing for it, and simply kisses him to shut him up. Will makes a slightly affronted noise, but he winds his arms around Hannibal's neck even so. Hannibal only wants to keep him there. He touches the breadth of his back, sighing at warm muscle under his hands. Will is intoxicating as always. When he pulls back, his lips are plush pink from kissing, his ears a little colored from it. Hannibal sighs at the sight. He has never wanted anyone so much.

"Hannibal," Will breathes softly.

"I'm here," he replies.

"I'm glad." Will sighs.

Hannibal can't quite stop touching him, but he's gentle about it. The room is warming, and Will is too now he's on his third beer and the dogs are settling in around the fire. He pushes his shirtsleeves up to his elbows.

"You want another drink?"

"I'd love one," Hannibal murmurs.

Will smiles and kisses him gently. He goes to the kitchen to pour Hannibal another glass and returns looking a little sheepish. "Sorry there's not uh - much to do. I spend so much time with the dogs or in the workshop I sort of forget about other stuff."

"Good company is entirely enough."

"I believe that from you."

Hannibal kisses him again. "Good."

They settle on Will's well-loved couch close to the fire. Will makes himself comfortable against Hannibal.

Hannibal asks him a few questions about the house. As usual, now he's had a drink Will is much more amenable to pleasant conversation - and less pleasant conversation. He talks a bit more about quitting his job and starting his business. Hannibal listens attentively, stroking his hair. Will lives a simple life now. He supports himself and his pack, and he seems content.

Despite knowing it was bad for him, and knowing he hated it, Hannibal imagines his psyche was well suited to life before this. He wonders if he bores himself senseless on purpose. The questions he asks, the insights he poses - all evidence of an extremely active mind. Even the books on the shelves aren't light reading, but here he is, tinkering and drinking on his porch like his father before him. Asking would be... rude, he thinks.

He strokes Will's hair at the thought and smiles as he uses the lull in conversation to pour Hannibal more wine. Hannibal is starting to feel pleasantly loose as well.

"If I didn't know better, Will, I'd say you were trying to get me drunk."

"Do you know better?" Will hums.

"You don't need to ply me with drink to get me into bed, so perhaps it's something else."

"Maybe I liked the lowered inhibitions the other night."

"Mine, or yours?"

Will laughs. "Both." He ducks his head. "I use a lot of energy keeping up with you. Nice to stop racing every once in a while."

Hannibal cups his chin. "I'm at your service."

"You're perfect," Will assures him, a little sadly now.

Hannibal pulls him into his lap to head it off. It has the intended effect of making Will laugh. Hannibal grasps a handful of curls and pulls. Again, he gets what he wants: Will gasps and arches his back. It rubs their hips together suggestively.

"Okay, you're bored of talking, I get it."

"On the contrary. But I'm... open to suggestion."

"As am I."

Hannibal hitches him closer. Will shifts a little, getting more comfortable. His hips rock against Hannibal.

"You look good all relaxed like this," Will murmurs.

Hannibal hums with delight. "I like your little house. And your questionable cooking skills."

Will smirks. "I like it when you're rude to me."

Hannibal tugs again. "Do you."

"Yeah, I do."

"It is somewhat against my nature..."

"You seem to manage it all right."

Hannibal grins and nips at him. "I'm terribly sorry." It doesn't sound sincere even to him.

Will laughs and bends to kiss him. This time it gets heated. It feels good to handle Will closer, warm and calm from booze. His hands seek below Will's clothes. He rustles his t-shirt up around his ribs to touch. Will promptly pulls it over his head.

"Better?" he asks.

Hannibal nips across his shoulders in answer. He feels the tremor in Will's muscles at the touch. He runs his hands up his thighs, only stopping briefly when Will knocks his hands back to start working open his shirt. Hannibal helps with the buttons.

Will sighs in approval when they're both bare. "Hannibal, you're gorgeous."

"I don't quite have words for what you are."

"You could try," he murmurs.

That sounds like a trap to Hannibal. He's got too much invested to not evade.

"I could try." He strokes Will's chest. "I'd rather show you."

"All right." Will allows, and Hannibal dips his head to kiss warm skin. His teeth graze gently as he lays a path down his chest. He sweeps left to circle a nipple with his tongue and Will's fingers curl into his hair. He seems pleased to have the chance to mess it up. He always does. Hannibal likes the way he shapes him with his hands. He plans on shaping Will with his mouth.

Resolved, he grips his hips and gently turns him onto his back on the couch. A couple of dogs shift when they do, but Hannibal ignores them. He just watches Will's face as he settles between his knees and unbuttons his jeans.

It mostly mirrors a lazy pleasure. Kissing his knee when he has relieved him of the denim, Hannibal leans over to resume the path of his mouth. He's ticklish over his ribs, delightfully. Hannibal shamelessly exploits the information, relishing the squirming.

"Stop," Will snickers, twisting away from his hands half-heartedly.

Hannibal just pins him down with a heavy forearm. He leans down and nips Will's hip when he stutters a vague protest. Then he spends a moment tracing over the fine skin there with his

tongue. He kisses the divot where it meets the flat of his lower stomach, and starts to pull at the waistband of his shorts.

Will sighs out a long, pleased breath. Hannibal sighs in content at the sight of him when he's naked, touch reverent on his thighs. His mouth explores that skin too, the muscles bunching under the silken surface, the scattered hairs tickling his lips. One hand smooths gently down Will's stomach, stopping low, his thumb smoothing over soft skin and dark hair. Will shivers.

"If you don't put your mouth on me soon, Hannibal -"

"Then what?" Hannibal smiles.

"Should I be threatening you or begging you? I can't decide."

"Hm, I do like to hear you beg."

"Threatening you it is, then." Will smirks, then softens. "Please, Hannibal, don't tease."

"You should try being teased, you might like it."

Will sighs, but he doesn't say no. Hannibal takes pity and kisses the inside of his thigh, keeping his hands moving.

He runs his fingers just lightly up the crease of his thighs. Will arches, whining softly.

"You're so soft here," Hannibal tells him. "Tender."

"You make me sound like dinner."

"Would you like me to eat you?"

Will cracks a grin at that, tongue touching the white crescent of his teeth. "God, yes."

"Very well then." Hannibal won't wait. He settles between Will's thighs and bows his head.

The taste is as intoxicating as ever. As is Will's soft cry. He traces over his soft opening, flicks the head of his cock with his tongue, then does it all again. Will grips at the arm of the couch and whines, knees hitching up.

"Oh god-"

Hannibal grins. Then he takes Will's cock into his mouth and sucks gently. Will only whines more. It's fast becoming Hannibal's favorite sound. It's all his favorite everything.

Will squirms into it almost constantly. His breaths are coming fast, voice taking on tones of pleading when he says Hannibal's name. Hannibal pulls back far enough to thrust his tongue inside him. Will groans and gently grasps his hair. Hannibal takes it as permission to go faster.

The way Will's hips rock into it is gratifying. He tastes good, feels better. Hannibal handles him closer and swiftly fills him up with his fingers. Will's hips buck up, hard. The way his fingers tighten in Hannibal's hair makes his stomach tighten.

"Yes, Hannibal, god."

Hannibal hums, sucking slow and gentle, feeling Will strain closer. He keeps begging softly. The weakness of his voice is entirely too edible for Hannibal to give in. He keeps his mouth in motion, slowly, savoring.

"Hannibal," Will's voice gets a little urgent now. He twists his fingers. "Fuck - please, please more-"

Eyes closing against the tugs on his hair, Hannibal focuses on the sensations he knows will bring Will off. It doesn't take long now he's familiar with what he likes. He feels privileged to have such insight. He feels privileged to bear witness to the way Will arches into ecstasy.

He cries out when he comes, shivery and low, and Hannibal wants to hear it every day for the rest of his life. He closes his eyes and breathes out. The fingers in his hair gentle, motions turning soothing instead of wringing. Hannibal licks over Will's cock again to feel him jolt. Too much, perhaps. Will tugs gently to summon him upward.

Hannibal pushes himself up accordingly. He's dizzied when Will doesn't just kiss him but flays him with it, cradling his jaw in one hand and smoothing back his hair with the other before he tugs their lips together. He lets himself blanket Will with his body.

"You're so good," Will sighs, rubbing their cheeks gently. He sounds dozy and soft. "Tell me what you want."

"You, Will."

"You can have me. All you have to do is be specific."

Hannibal sighs, nearly dizzy with desire. "Fuck me again."

"All right." Will squeezes his shoulder gently.

Hannibal tips their foreheads together. Will kisses him again, long and lazy with desire. Eventually he arches up to nudge Hannibal off him.

"C'mon." Hannibal stands obligingly, lets himself be steered over to the bed. "Y'take the rest of your clothes off?" Will smiles and opens his bedside drawer to get out the harness and the toy they used last time.

It's hard to concentrate on himself, with the compulsion to watch Will. He barely even folds his slacks when he's taken them off. He does, of course, but he doesn't take much care. Will is grinning at him when he steps into the harness and shimmies it up. He looks - something like grateful. Hannibal wants to argue it is he that should be grateful, to be given this. Instead, he sits on the edge of the bed and helps Will get everything in place.

Will leans down for a kiss, cupping his cheek with a gentle palm. Hannibal touches his hips, thumbs stroking his skin. He leans in to kiss Will's stomach when he straightens.

"Take me however you like," he says softly.

Will shivers. He pulls Hannibal to his feet to push down his shorts, taking his cock gently in hand - so hard he aches a little by now - and stroking. "Gladly. I think I want to watch this time."

"What do you want to watch, Will?" Hannibal arches into his touch with a slow exhalation.

"You. I want to see your face."

"You can see whatever you like."

Hannibal keeps close, and Will keeps stroking him. He's breathing hard by the time Will sets a hand on his shoulder and presses.

"Lie down."

He retrieves a bottle of lube from the dresser near the bed and prepares Hannibal with the same steady, thorough motions he always does, standing at the edge of the mattress with his other hand holding Hannibal's thigh down against his bed as he opens him up. Hannibal thrills under his deft hands. All his nerves are chorusing, sweet and high, and Will is angelic over him with his muscles coiled and his startling blue eyes seeing nothing but Hannibal.

"You're watching," he rasps.

"I said I wanted to, didn't I?"

"What else do you want to do?"

Will twists his fingers deep and then withdraws them carefully. "I want to fuck you."

"Do it."

He watches Will spread more lube over his cock before he steadies the base with his hand, sets the other on the mattress and presses into Hannibal with one smooth push. Hannibal keens softly, eyes still meeting Will's. He arches up and Will's hands fit to his middle like they were meant to be, knees tucked against the brackets of his elbows. The next snap of his hips makes Hannibal see stars.

"It's perfect," he breathes.

Will just ducks his head to kiss the centre of his chest and keeps going. He licks his lips, and Hannibal stares, hoping more words will fall from them.

"You're like something I dreamed," he murmurs eventually, voice rough with the strain of his movements.

"I could wish nothing more," Hannibal replies.

Will's eyelids flutter. He bends low and kisses Hannibal deep, hips still rolling in deep, purposeful thrusts. Hannibal gives him a moan as a reward, rising from deep in his chest and unrestrained. It feels incredible to let Will fuck him uninhibited by sober nerves. He's nearly fierce. He glows with it, fingers pressing into Hannibal's skin as he moves faster. Hannibal's hands find his shoulders for purchase. Every stroke sets off a hot wash of pleasure. He can't keep it down no matter how much he tries - every way he's touched Will has left him breathless, but having him like this is like veneration of the highest order.

"Your face," Will murmurs. "Do you need more?"

Hannibal can't speak, only nod. Will shifts their positions slightly, so he can support himself with one hand. The other begins to stroke Hannibal again. The groan that escapes Hannibal is more raw than he'd anticipated; more honest. Pleasure burns through him, from the coiled muscles in his legs and shoulders to the rough pull of Will's hand. He can barely keep his eyes open. In tandem with the shove of his hips, Will's touch has him coiling up and trembling inside of minutes.

"More, Will..."

He gives him more, faster and harder, teeth bared and curls bouncing. He looks even more like an angel than ever.

Hannibal closes his eyes to hear the strike of their flesh and the way Will feeds the fire in him with his touch and it flares and swells and swallows him up in a great hot rush. Everything goes white and he loses himself in it for a moment or ten.

His teeth are still clenched when he opens his eyes, body still swayed by Will's slowing movements. He can feel him with every atom in his body; the last lingering frissons of the orgasm that's left him trembling. Will touches his cheek and Hannibal breathes out hard and shaky. He doesn't trust himself to speak. When Will presses a scarce kiss to the thin skin under each of his eyes, he has to bite down on it even more.

"Let me just clean you up," Will murmurs.

"Yes please," Hannibal breathes. He's loath to let Will pull away, but he only takes a moment wiping his skin down with a hot washcloth before he eases over Hannibal's thighs, sans harness, and slowly covers him with his body. Hannibal threads a lazy hand through his curls.

Between them they manage to shift more comfortably onto the mattress without Will falling off. He smooths his hands over Hannibal's chest then, looking tired and content. "I need to not move for a while," he mumbles.

"That sounds very agreeable," Hannibal says.

"Okay, good." He closes his eyes. Hannibal strokes up the plane of his back, taking him in.

"Are you all right?"

"Yeah, 'mgood. Just exhausted." At Hannibal's enquiring noise, he kisses his temple. "Bad night last night. Up early."

"Sorry to hear that."

"Mm, don't be, I'm glad you're here." He seems content to go to sleep more or less on top of him. Hannibal thinks he might be, too. Certainly not discontented enough to move. He strokes Will's back and feels his skin and muscle and bone against Hannibal's own with every nerve in him, soaking it in. Soon Will feels even heavier, drifting off into sleep.

Hannibal buries his nose in his shoulder and drifts off too.

*

He's roused a couple of hours later when he wakes to the sound of the door; Will standing like a specter in his boxers, letting the dogs out, the fire burnt down to a soft glow from neglect.

"Sorry," he says when he sees Hannibal roll over.

"Don't be. It was early when we uh - settled in." He sits up, stretching. "Did something wake you other than the dogs?"

"Noise outside. Probably a coyote. The perils of the country." Will smiles and comes back to the edge of the bed. Hannibal smiles to see him relaxed. He tousles his hair gently.

"Perhaps cake and coffee now?"

"Yeah, I was gonna suggest the same thing."

They are in agreement, then. Hannibal can't help but consider that they're in sync in many different ways. Will leans in to kiss him softly, interrupting his musing.

“Come on. Let me get you some coffee."

Hannibal spurs himself to get up and follow him into the kitchen, once he's located his pants. Will seems quite at his leisure in his underwear as he mills about putting grounds in a French press and heating water. Hannibal is decidedly not above ogling the contractor anymore - especially now he's not his contractor. Hannibal's just trying not to touch him and interrupt the coffee making.

Unexpectedly, a couple of dogs come and make themselves comfortable around his feet. The smallest one - Napoleon complex - jumps up into his lap unceremoniously. Will comes over to fuss, but Hannibal waves him off.

"It's all right." He lets Buster settle, and then strokes slowly at his ears, bemused: usually animals don't warm to him. Usually the feeling is mutual. This is loving Will though, he knows. This is who he is.

His sister's voice comes to mind unbidden. Another loved one. He can admit this, though he shouldn't. *Bury his bones.* He sighs and scratches between Buster's shoulders, startling when another wet nose shoves under his arm.

"They're jealous now," Will muses.

"Not unexpected."

"No," Will laughs, bringing him a cup of coffee.

Hannibal thanks him and sips. Will brings over two plates balanced on a Tupperware with a knife, setting them down with his own coffee before he sits in the other chair. He nudges his leg out so their knees touch and scruffs Winston gently when he comes to rest his head in his lap. Then he serves them both a piece of cake with a smile.

Hannibal is relieved when Will clicks his fingers and mutters "git," and all the dogs simultaneously disappear to lie on their spot in front of the fire.

"Impressive," he murmurs.

"We have a lot of training time," Will says, ears turning pink.

"Your dedication shows."

Hannibal touches his cheek briefly before taking up a forkful of cake. He wonders how many times Will tried to bake it. It's perfectly nice. Will seems pleased with it, but quiet.

Hannibal nudges his knee with a toe. "It's lovely."

He dips his head. "Good."

They eat in comfortable quiet, the light of the kitchen like a little glowing world in the complete darkness of the farm. Afterwards, they get ready to return to bed. Hannibal anticipates their day tomorrow, but is still unsure which version of Will he'll wake up next to.

*

He's not expecting to be roused by Will kissing his stomach, but he is. Not just kissing, but slow, purposeful exploration. Hannibal shivers, enjoying the first curls of lazy arousal at the touch. Will's eyes flash up at him as he sneaks a peek; sees that he's awake.

"Good morning," Hannibal rumbles.

"Hope it will be," Will purrs softly back.

It's already superior to any spent alone. Will slowly tugs away Hannibal's boxers and spends a while nursing his rising cock with his tongue and hands before he takes him fully into his mouth.

Hannibal allows himself to release the noise in his throat and Will answers with a long sigh. His suction is slow and intense. It's dizzying to be so on edge so suddenly, oversaturated with sensation. Hannibal bites his lips to keep quiet, but Will's hands are stroking over his hips and down the insides of his thighs, taking in the grain of his skin and muscle, driving him insane.

Reaches to touch his curls, Hannibal breathes his name. The movements of Will's mouth seem to be growing in intent, sucking faster, his fingers tightening. He meets Hannibal’s gaze, cheeks and the bridge of his nose kissed pink.

"Perfect," Hannibal says.

Will hollows his cheeks to take him deeper and his lashes shade his eyes. Hannibal stares down at him, still feeling dizzy. The rush of heat in his belly swells like a wave. He tugs at Will's hair to warn him, feels the flicker of his throat as he swallows around him. He doesn't pull back.

Hannibal's jaw slacks as it crests. He groans Will's name as he swallows around Hannibal again in answer, and he loses awareness for a moment as he comes, briefly nothing but pulses of pleasure and the hot draw of Will's mouth. Then Will pulls off. His hand comes up to gently milk the last shivers of it out of him, and Hannibal groans softly at the overstimulation.

Will is gazing up at him now. It takes them both a minute to catch their breath. Hannibal tugs him back up the bed.

"Morning," Will says softly, and Hannibal kisses him, pressing with his tongue for a taste of himself. Will gives it to him with a sigh. They kiss lazily for many moments. Finally, Will hums. "Come shower with me."

*

Despite distraction, they manage to leave the house within a couple of hours with a lunch (which may involve pasta) and only a couple of nearly broken necks when the dogs and Will cross on the porch steps. Will drives them to the dock where he's keeping his boat and lets Hannibal poke around curiously while he does his checks.

The sky above them is crisp and mostly clear, mid morning sun climbing higher. Will quickly has them underway and heading out of the marina. Eyes shielded against the sun with his hand, Hannibal leans on the rail of the little trawler and watches the water give beneath the hull like skin under a knife.

Eventually he turns to watch Will instead. He's wearing shades, uncommonly bare in a just thin cotton t-shirt and jeans. It's not Hannibal's style at all, but he looks so mouth-wateringly good like this that he can hardly concentrate. Will spots Hannibal watching and grins.

"Want to come steer?" he offers.

"I'd like that. I confess I've never done it before."

"No time like the present." He motions him over and shows him how everything works, the steps aside. Hannibal keeps his hands firmly on the wheel, conscious of Will close by. It's enjoyable, he finds. So is having Will's full attention. "Shoulda known you'd be good at this."

Hannibal shrugs. "I enjoy driving."

"Mm, I know." Will leans against the back of his shoulder and sighs. He directs Hannibal occasionally, just to make sure he's following the buoys correctly, but other than that they are quiet for some time. Eventually, Will nudges his shoulder with his nose. "Ready to stop?"

Hannibal nods and moves aside. Will cuts the engine and slowly lets the boat come to a stop out of the main sail path. He meanders down to drop anchor.

Hannibal goes back to a padded bench to sit down. The water is smooth as glass, quiet and tranquil. When Will comes back up to find him, he looks calm and a little tired.

"Don't suppose you'd want to fish for a while?"

"I'm happy to read my book," Hannibal assures him. "You can do whatever you like, Will."

Will nods. "Join in if you like."

"I'm not much of a fisherman."

Will smiles and goes to a compartment for tackle. It's relaxing just watching him set up. Hannibal wishes he'd brought his sketchbook. His memory will suffice, but it lacks immediacy. He makes sure to commit it fiercely. It means everything else fades slightly.

Eventually, Will glances back at him. The sun makes his curls glow gold. "Having fun?" he murmurs.

"I'm finding it satisfactory."

"Uh huh." Will grins.

They check one another's position periodically after that while they dedicate themselves to their tasks: Will fishing, Hannibal pretending not to stare at Will. He's not pretending all that hard; he doesn't think Will expects him to. Though he does read some of his book, intermittently. The sun and the gentle movement of the boat is relaxing. Hannibal feels himself awash with heaviness; a lethargy born purely of pleasure. He watches Will a while longer and then stretches to wake himself up.

"Are you nearly ready for lunch?"

Will reels his lure in and stashes his rod in a holder. "Let me just wash up."

"Of course." Hannibal nods. He busies himself with the basket. Will disappears down to the cabin to clean his hands with bottled water. When he returns, he's smiling. He drops down by Hannibal and helps set things out. They sit side by side on the bench and fill plates.

"Beautiful weather," Hannibal comments blithely as they start to eat.

"It is. Thanks for the idea."

"I gave you the idea?"

"Well." Will blushes. "In a manner of speaking. I spent a lot of time thinking of things we could do together."

Hannibal tilts his head, surprised. "Did you?"

"I spend a lot of time thinking about you, period."

"Do you?" Hannibal takes a bite of pasta salad, hiding a smile.

"Yes," Will sounds a bit petulant at the question.

"That is... mutual, I am afraid."

"Great," Will says, failing to sound entirely sarcastic. Hannibal lets him see his smile this time, brushing his thumb across the corner of Will's mouth. He turns away from the touch, but he's smiling too, just a little.

Hannibal lets him pull away. They eat a while longer in agreeable quiet. "I asked my sister to visit," Hannibal puts in eventually.

"That will be nice, won't it," Will murmurs. "She can see your house."

"Yes, she amuses herself greatly with my interior decorating."

Will smiles down at the deck. "I'm sure she does."

"She'll like the parts that you were responsible for the most," Hannibal tells him. "As do I."

Will turns back to him with a small smile. "Good."

Hannibal touches a curl of his hair. "Done eating?"

"Yeah. It was delicious, thanks for making it." He lets Hannibal take his plate and set it aside, and pull him closer.

"You're welcome," he says softly. He touches his face again.

Will leans into it this time. Hannibal kisses him, leaning close and only touching his cheek, and Will's fingers fasten into his shirt loosely. Hannibal lets himself be tugged close. Will is malleable and warm like this, throat bared. Hannibal wants to do so many things to him: Will had declined reciprocation to his wake up earlier in the interest of speed. Hannibal wonders if he's feeling the same now. He touches his chest gently in exploration.

Will only sighs and touches his hair, obviously reveling in the feeling of it soft and product free. Hannibal slips off the bench to kneel at his feet.

"What's this?" Will says, with a little smile.

"I'm merely feeling moved, dear Will." Will's jeans are warm to the touch, his thighs strong.

"That's a very poetic way of saying 'horny', Hannibal."

Hannibal smiles, laying his cheek against the denim. "You have such a way with words yourself."

"I feel like I've lost most of them."

"I wish you'd lose the rest."

Will's hands tugs at his hair. "What are you going to do about it?"

Hannibal gives him a reproachful look as he unbuttons Will's jeans in answer. Will smirks and lifts his hips to help slip them down. Hannibal takes his boxers too, nosing the bare inside of his knee.

"Let's see how you enjoy this."

He grips Will's thighs to hitch him forward so he can shoulder between his knees, licking slow at first. He knows Will's body well enough now to make it quick, but still paralyzingly good. He starts with steady suction to feel him arch and shift to get closer.

The addition of his tongue makes his thighs shake. "Hannibal." It sounds like an exaltation, his knees falling further apart and one hand coming up to tousle Hannibal's hair again gently. Hannibal hums against him. "Oh - Jesus," Will hisses softly.

Hannibal looks up. Will looks beatific, curls glowing and skin bright in the sun. His face is utterly slack with passion, and Hannibal feels overwhelmed by it all. He closes his eyes and spreads him gently with his fingers, licking deeper, Will's noises encouraging and needy. He feels the tremors predicting release as they build, slowly but steadily, diverts back to sucking him when his movements get frustrated.

Will makes a low, ragged noise, sounding grateful. "Hannibal, that's - so good-" his hands pluck at Hannibal's hair as he pushes the words out. Then he seizes up, jaw slacking at the swirl of Hannibal's tongue. Hannibal feels the rush of come and groans softly.

"Fuck," Will hisses, fingers tightening, "god, I love your mouth."

Hannibal pulls off. "You're so gorgeous, Will."

He tips his head back, breathing deep. "Glad you think so." His fingers loosen in Hannibal's hair, motions turning to stroking sweep. Hannibal stays on his knees. He likes watching Will put himself back together and Will, at least in these moments, tolerates it.

Eventually he starts to shift his jeans back up with a sigh. Hannibal curves a hand around his calf and squeezes gently, then stands. Will tugs him down into a slow kiss before he can get

too far. Caught by surprise, Hannibal has to relax into it. It's not as hard as he'd like to imagine. It's not hard at all.

Finally, Will lets him pull away, stretching lazily. He goes over to check on the boat's controls.

"We've been out here longer than I thought. You wanna stay a little longer or start back?"

"Whatever you like, Will. Is there anywhere you wanted to go?"

Will gives a considering silence. Hannibal lets him process. "We could go a little further."

Hannibal nods. "All right."

Will pulls up the anchor and gets them moving while Hannibal paces up and down the tiny deck. He's quite at his leisure, still lingering on the little electrical pulses of arousal in his veins, unconcerned. The longer he lets them percolate, the sweeter release will feel.

He glances at Will, who catches his eye and grins so that his neat little teeth look sharp and fiercely bright in the sun, against the dark thatch of his beard. Hannibal swallows his desire again. He's obsessed, so deeply that it feels dangerous - feels like it could devour them, swallowing them and the little boat they stand on, dragging them down to the depths. Somewhere the sun can't penetrate. Somewhere where they are entirely alone.

He licks his lips at the thought. He's been reckless before. He'd be it again if Will would allow it.

Oblivious to the turn of Hannibal's thoughts, Will steers them on. Hannibal goes to stand behind him. He loops an arm around Will's narrow waist.

"Got your sea legs?" Will says, amused.

"I think I will survive. This is just more pleasant."

Turning his nose against Hannibal's cheek briefly, Will hums in agreement. "I think you'll like the spot I'm taking us to see."

"Where is it? A secret place?"

"No, but it's beautiful. You'll see."

Curious but happy to be shown, Hannibal tucks his chin over his shoulder. "Your father taught you how to sail?"

He feels Will nod. "When I was tiny." He adds, "We used to go on fishing trips whenever we could. Dad was a diesel mechanic. He'd borrow boats from wherever he was working and take me out on the gulf. Or out on the bayou if all we could get was a little john boat. Catch fish, turtles, crayfish. Some people down there don't have any other way to get their meat. Sometimes we didn't either." Hannibal feels him shrug a little. "Didn't seem so bad when I was a kid. It was just the way it was."

"I can picture you fishing as a child," Hannibal tells him.

Will goes a little quiet then. "What do you see?"

"Tangled curls, serious blue eyes. Dirty fingers and scrapes. Quiet. Patient."

Will sighs. His body bows back against Hannibal's just so. "Pretty accurate."

"I'd be interested to hear your evaluation of me."

"As a child?" At Hannibal's nod, he hums thoughtfully. "Quiet too. Not quite so serious. You have a spitefulness to you that you keep in check, but I imagine it was hard back then, especially with a little sister to bounce off. You were one another's only true friends. Long summers with grass tickling bare legs and walks in the woods. Playing hunting games."

Hannibal sighs. Every word tickles a memory. Will's mind, as ever, is exceptional. "How do you know we played hunting games?"

"You just seem the type."

Hannibal thinks of his decor and smiles. "You fished. We hunted." He leans in and kisses Will's cheek.

Will crooks him a smile. "Not going to argue the spitefulness?"

"No point denying something I know to be a fault of mine. Being aware of one's faults is just as important as being aware of others' virtues."

Will laughs softly. "Well said, Doctor."

Hannibal bites his ear in gentle redemption. Then he soothes the curve with his tongue, and Will laughs at him softly. Hannibal knows he deserves it.

Eventually Will points to a little island - mostly populated by trees and grasses, barely the size of Hannibal's back garden. "I've camped here before. Sometimes I bring one or two of the dogs."

"Is camping likely to occur in the future?"

Will laughs. "You should see your face when you say 'camping.'"

"I have a feeling you mentioned it to see my face."

He can feel Will's casual shrug. "You're a little like a house cat. I like ruffling you. Come on." He's dropping anchor and reaching to moor the boat at the little dock on the island.

Hannibal steps along behind, slightly bemused. Will seems to know where he's going. Hannibal is, as ever, happy to follow as Will weaves them through the trees a short distance. Their feet shuffle over a carpet of leaves. Curiosity peaked, Hannibal catches his hand.

"Is there something in particular you want me to see, Will?"

Will doesn't answer right away. They come to a clearing on the small scratch of land. Their shoes touch the edge of a shallow pool of water; a miniature lake held in a ring of towering trees and scrub. There's even a soft sand bank down into the little pond. It’s very clear, like something from a book Hannibal might have read as a child - their own personal Fey Pools.

"Swim with me," Will challenges.

Hannibal looks around, then nods. "All right."

He's warmed by the way Will's eyes roam over him. Even so, he wasn't entirely prepared to see Will starting to strip his clothes off again, grinning like a schoolboy as he piles everything carefully on top of his shoes. Hannibal resigns himself to following suit. He can't remember the last time he'd swum like this. Possibly never. He wasn't a particularly carefree child. He's not a carefree man either.

Will is already stepping into the water, bare and lean and smiling. Hannibal hurries up: he doesn't want to miss whatever new opportunities this might afford him.

The water, when his feet touch, is not cold. It’s still surprisingly refreshing, though the mud is less pleasant. Will laughs, presumably at him. Hannibal smiles despite himself.

"We're not all country boys, Will."

"Come on. I'll make it worth it for you."

That's the reason Hannibal is here. He wades into the water with more purpose, surprisingly deep, clear enough that he sees plumes of sand form where his feet sink into the silt. Will greets him where the water is deepest, dipping under the surface so it slicks his hair back, droplets sparkling on his lashes and cheeks.

"Hannibal," he murmurs.

"Will." He reaches out to stroke a few strays back from his forehead. "You look good wet."

Will stands and puts his wet hands on Hannibal's chest, petting over the hair there. "Mm, so do you."

"Are we... swimming?" Hannibal asks mildly.

"Sure." Will pulls back, letting the water take his weight as he leans back into it with a grin. He's bashful even with his nudity concealed by the water, great tiles of white light bouncing up in fractals from the sun. Hannibal pushes off into a crawl, to see how many strokes he can get in. He can feel Will watching him, never far behind.

When he tires of the limited diameter, he floats for a moment. Will appears behind him, chest cool against his back, lips brushing Hannibal's temple. He's quiet, hands resting easily on Hannibal's flanks. Hannibal lets himself be held. With the gentle swish of the water, the sun

dappling their skin through the trees, he starts to see why Will would want to show him. It's like a nest, a peaceful oasis. Nothing except what you bring with you.

Will kicks gently under the water so they spin in a slow, lazy circle. Weightless, womblike, entangled. "I will likely fall asleep if we keep this up," Hannibal says, and even his voice seems muffled in the soft space of the trees.

"I'd hold on to you."

Hannibal tips his head backs against Will's shoulder to look at him, and he’s watching Hannibal right back, face warm and serene with affection. Hannibal’s heart feels suddenly fragile and trembling at the sight of him. This was a terrible idea.

"Perhaps we should go," he says, suddenly.

Will looks surprised, eyes clouding with doubt. "Oh - if you want?"

Hannibal is weak for him. As always. "This was your request, we can swim as long as we like."

"But you..." Will frowns. "I've upset you, somehow - or you're uncomfortable."

"Neither, Will."

Will keeps looking at him steadily. He looks completely disbelieving. "Then what? Tell me.” When Hannibal remains silent, he curls his lip. “Oh, let me guess - too poor for you?"

Hannibal turns to face him then, both of them finding their feet in the water. He feels a rare flash of uncontrolled hurt, spiraling into hot, unkind anger. "What exactly about my ten years in an orphanage suggests to you that I haven't experienced *poorness*, Will?"

The words sting the air. Will bites down on his lip hard enough to turn it white, opening his mouth to speak, but Hannibal turns away as he tries to leash his desire to run. He can't - there is literally nowhere for him to go, unless he fancies a long swim and a hike through unfamiliar woods.

"Hannibal..." Will's voice is faint. The ripple of the water announces his proximity, and his fingers glide up Hannibal's bare shoulder. "I'm sorry. I shouldn't... I didn't mean to say that." Hannibal allows himself to be soothed, even if Will doesn't know the extent of what hurts. The brush of Will's lips against his skin only relieves it a fraction. "I've been told I'm rude when I'm scared," he continues softly.

"Why are you scared, Will?"

"Because... I'm showing you things that are important to me and I don't know what you're thinking."

"I'm thinking I'm grateful for the opportunity to see them."

"But when you said we should go..."

"You're not the only one who feels he's showing things."

Will sighs quietly. His temple touches Hannibal's ear as he trails his fingers down his stomach. "Do you want me to take you home?"

"What is my other choice, Will?"

"It's whatever you want. We can stay here, in the water. We can get back on the boat. Just tell me what you want."

Hannibal feels as if he's surrounded by mines. He wants their steady, easy peace back from before. He wants Will to feel this same desperate need. He turns back to him again, hands coming up to frame Will's shoulders gently. He kisses him, because above all he wants *that*, and the noise Will makes is strangely grateful. It has not escaped him that he's now the one using sex to escape a conversation. It seems to be a method that works for them.

Will's hands squeeze his flanks, the kiss sliding into more urgent territory. It’s easily stoked with all their skin pressed close; the sun beating down. Hannibal feels himself hardening against Will's thigh. The little groan Will gives is enticing, and then he shifts to let Hannibal's cock press up between his legs, snug in the heat of his thighs. Hannibal whimpers his name.

Will just clasps his thighs gently and sighs, arching forward. "Fuck me," he murmurs. "Right here, like this."

Hannibal's breath leaves him for a moment, and then he inhales shakily and rocks. The water twines between them like silk, their skin heating where it touches, and Will's breath mists against Hannibal's cheek. His hands find the back of Hannibal's neck and twist together. It's too easy to grip the flesh of his ass and drive forward between his thighs, rewarded by a stuttered whine; the chorusing slaps of the water around them.

"Will," he sighs.

"Don't stop," Will urges, stroking through his sodden hair.

Hannibal isn't sure he could. His breaths are ragged already, movements growing in fervor. He's only trying to hold back whatever words might escape. Will presses kisses to the corner of his mouth, soft and sweet, and Hannibal loses himself in the heat and friction. It doesn't take long at all. Soon he's gasping, feeling himself spill into the water, Will squeezing his thighs around him in slow pulses. Even waist deep in water, Hannibal can feel he's slick. Will's breath paints his throat now and he soothes his palms down Hannibal's back.

"Was it good?" he whispers.

"Will." Hannibal tips their cheeks together, grain of stubble and scruff catching. "Of course it was."

"You're not unhappy we stayed?"

Sighing, Hannibal gives him a gentle squeeze. "No, Will."

Will is holding onto him, a foreign feeling so far - he's physically demonstrative, but Hannibal isn't used to feeling him tangibly *clutch*, like he might disappear. He leans his weight in, expecting Hannibal to hold him, and Hannibal can do nothing less.

"I'm sorry," Will says quietly into his neck.

"Please don't apologize."

"I have to."

"Then I am sorry too."

"You didn't do anything wrong," Will protests.

"Neither did you. Let's not speak of it again."

Will sighs again, a heavy and fearful thing. His arms tighten around Hannibal and Hannibal kisses him again.

"You're catching the sun," he mutters, "we should think about making tracks."

"All right," Will finally lets go. He treads out onto the bank and pulls his boxers on with a wriggle. "I've got a towel in the cabin, I'll get it for you."

He's off like a Greek athlete before Hannibal can reply. He contents himself with waiting at the water's edge, swiping some of the excess out of his hair, the sun already starting to dry his shoulders.

Will comes back with the towel and a sheepish smile. "Thank you," Hannibal takes the small towel he offers with a smile and dries himself as much as he can. He dresses himself while Will busies himself with his own clothes. They're both carefully quiet, and Will seems preoccupied with the boat. Hannibal is, as usual, preoccupied with Will. He tries to be polite about it, making careful conversation.

Will is equally tepid, somewhat more shamefaced. Hannibal feels guilty about that. His mood isn't Will's fault. Something about Will inspires him to feel a myriad of strange new things. He never used to feel remorse for anything. He'd existed in a bubble until now, he thinks. A clean plastic world, ordered by himself alone. He'd needed it - a desperate, megalomaniacal clutch for control - for his own environment. Now, he's not sure he doesn't need someone else's. He is afraid that has become Will.

The short sail back to the shore is almost silent. Will holds out a hand to help Hannibal back onto the jetty.

Hannibal compliments the boat as Will closes everything up.

"She's not runnin' too bad compared to when I got her," Will agrees mildly.

"You have talented hands for such things."

Will glances at him. A hint of amusement comes back into his face. "Thanks." He takes the picnic basket off Hannibal as they walk back to the car.

"What now?" he asks when they're buckled in.

Hannibal considers whether he means it with regards to their situation, or their destination. He's not inclined to guess. "Whatever you like."

It's the easiest answer there is. Will visibly suppresses a sigh as he pulls out of the parking lot and back onto the road toward home - his home. Hannibal wants to take him back to bed and not let him leave until Monday morning. It might be the only way they survive the weekend. He suspects they won't, otherwise. Not in this state. They haven't made plans for tonight - Will hadn't suggested he stay again - but Hannibal has an awful feeling that if he leaves now it will put paid to everything.

"Could I make us dinner later?" he asks quietly.

Will thinks about it, then shrugs a shoulder up. "Sure, Hannibal."

"In that case, could we stop at a grocery store?"

"Anywhere you prefer? I'm guessing the co-op isn't gonna have what you need."

Hannibal quickly checks his phone, finds a suitable grocer, and gives Will the address. It's a short trip but not a cheap one. When they arrive back at the farm house, Will seems slightly more relaxed for having been distracted, though. While he sorts the pack, Hannibal opens a bottle of wine to breathe.

Will excuses himself to walk the dogs then, leaving Hannibal to cook undisturbed. His thoughts follow Will through the darkening fields. They swoop as crazily as his heart. He should extract himself from this situation, he thinks, if he's to survive it with it intact. And yet, he still doesn't want to. All he wants is Will.

He sighs and goes on slicing onions into thin crescents. He'll just put it into the dinner. Hopefully his sourness doesn't spoil the flavor of the meat.

When Will returns, he looks resolute. He sidles in front of the oven and crosses his arms. "Hannibal."

"Will." He looks up, pausing in his whisking of marinade.

"I'm not letting you touch this oven again until we talk."

Surprise flickers in Hannibal, under curiosity. "Very well, what would you like to talk about?"

"I want to talk about why I lost you back there."

"Lost me." Hannibal repeats it carefully. "I don't know what you mean."

"You went somewhere, and I didn't know where."

Hesitation makes him silent for a few seconds, and then he relents when Will's expression stays expectant. "You are familiar with mentally hiding from uncomfortable situations. Distancing yourself."

"Yes," Will says quietly.

Hannibal shrugs. "So am I. I felt vulnerable."

"My fault?"

"Mine. You've made your limits clear and I still find myself trying to climb walls without conscious effort."

"I - suppose I have, but. Can we discuss it?"

Hannibal's heart stutters. "Of course."

"Over dinner?"

"Or now, if you like. There's time before it's done. Especially if the oven is still off-limits."

"I don't actually want to mess up your cooking," Will blushes.

"No, but I don't necessarily want it to be ruined should our conversation go badly, either." He sets the knife aside and moves to stand opposite Will. "Tell me what you want to talk about."

Will sighs, looking down at the tiles between their feet. "Feelings, unfortunately."

"Unfortunately?" Hannibal's stomach coils unhappily.

"I don't like talking about them much, you know that."

"I'm aware. Tell me about yours."

"I... like you a lot, it turns out," Will sighs again. "Don't pull away. I was upset this afternoon, when I thought you were." He bites his lip. "In the past - people get bored, I say stuff like I did earlier all the time - it's. A habit. A bad habit - a defense mechanism. And I sometimes just need to be alone..." he gestures around. "You can probably tell. But I - I like having you around, and I'm sorry that I warned you off at first."

"I'm not bored with you," Hannibal assures him quickly. "You keep me quite occupied, whatever you think. I was never one for conventional relationships either."

Will finally looks at him, just a peek. "But this is one."

"I'd say, despite our efforts, that it is, yes."

"Okay," Will murmurs. "I like what we're doing so far."

Hannibal's heart doesn't know what to do with itself. "Me too. Very much."

"I just. I'm sorry."

"Why are you sorry? Tell me what you need."

"Do you forgive me for hurting you?"

Hannibal looks at him for a long moment, and then at his feet. "I was... irritated at myself for how fond I am of you."

"You thought I wouldn't like it."

"You had suggested you might not."

"Yes," Will hangs his head.

"I don't believe it would be productive for me to blackmail you with my feelings. I think you've had enough of that in your life - and I know how susceptible... I didn't want you to feel pressured."

"Okay. I get it."

Hannibal shifts a bit, unsure. Finally, Will speaks again.

"I think - I think I feel the same, though. Which is... terrifying."

Hannibal isn't terrified. He's filled with a violent sense of both relief and delight. He steps forward, and Will turns red.

"That wasn't very flattering, was it?"

"On the contrary. It was honest."

"I'll try to be that," Will murmurs.

"You generally are. Tell me honestly what's changed, Will. There isn't a wrong answer."

"I... miss you when you're not around. That has to mean something."

"I'd like to think so." Hannibal takes in Will's body language; caved shoulders and anxious movement in his hands and neck. He's intimately familiar with loss. Will's given in to it.

The compulsion to promise he has no intention of leaving him - ever, if he can help it - is almost winning. Instead, wisely, Hannibal reaches out and gently stills his hands. "This can be whatever we want it to be, Will. I can't promise you I won't disappoint you, but I can promise I will endeavor not to."

He lets himself be stilled under Hannibal's hands and bows his head, nodding uncertainly. "Good, because I like it."

“So do I.” They stay like that for some time, Hannibal stroking absently over his shoulders with his thumbs. He's pleased when Will steps in, close like he was in the water, and tucks

himself under his chin for a moment. "May I finish our dinner now?"

"If I can help."

"Of course."

Some time later, when they're actually eating, Will studies him meditatively, sipping his wine.

"Something on your mind, Will?"

"Just wondering things. Things I probably shouldn't be wondering."

"Tell me?"

"Your mind fascinates me."

"A mutual sentiment, I assure you."

"It has dark spots, doesn't it?"

Hannibal pauses, setting his knife and fork down and dabbing at his mouth with his napkin. "No mind is purely light and pleasantness." Will gives him a flat look. "What can I say, Will? You know of my past. It's quite a wonder I turned out the way I did, my mind might have been something much darker.

Will sips his wine. "What's the worst thing you've done, then, Hannibal?"

The question brings him up short. He doesn't want to lie. "I wouldn't say it was the worst, but others certainly might. The man who killed my parents - he'd broken in during bad weather and surprised my father on the stairs." He sees Will's eyes close, but Hannibal knows he's listening. "He shot my mother while she was trying to hide us in her closet, Mischa and I." It still hurts to say it. He takes a deep breath. "There was a katana in the closet with us - a gift from my aunt. When he opened the door, I already had it in hand."

"You cut him down," Will murmurs, eyes still shut.

Hannibal nods. His throat feels tight. "I couldn't let him hurt my sister. I cut him to pieces. The police who came - eventually - they said it was shock."

Will's eyes open again, and he looks at Hannibal with wide, pale eyes. "Did you think it was shock?"

"No," Hannibal murmurs. "I knew what it was."

"Justice," Will's voice wavers. He reaches out and covers Hannibal's hand with his own on the tabletop. Another silent apology.

Hannibal meets his eyes steadily. Will holds their gaze though Hannibal knows it must be uncomfortable for him to do so - he sees so much.

"Will this chat be quid pro quo, Will?" he asks mildly.

Will looks down at that. "God, it ought to be, shouldn't it."

Hannibal tilts his head. "It doesn't have to be."

"Fair is fair."

"All right. Tell me the worst thing you've ever done, Will."

Will sighs. "I was young, too. Not that it's an excuse.

"We're less capable of rational restraint as children."

"Maybe it's more honest."

"Tell me what you thought it was, Will."

"Spiteful, maybe."

"What did you do?"

"There was a boy at my high school who was… cruel, but hid it well. He got away with terrible things. I... made something happen that he couldn't get away with."

Hannibal waits, head tilted in curiosity. "You framed him?"

"I made his crimes more obvious." Will pauses. "By staging one to be found out."

"What did he do, Will?"

"Tried to drug me. I knew he would, it was his routine... so I led him on, had someone record it - made sure he got caught."

Hannibal feels a cold stone of certainty settle in his gut. "What happened to him?"

"Not as much as should have... until the cops found the enormous stash of drugs in his room. He lost his football scholarship, and with a felony on his record his job chances weren't too great." The way Will says it, it's clear he engineered each step.

"It was his word against yours?"

"Mine, and a couple of the girls in my year." Will sighs and scratches the back of his neck. “My first undercover gig.”

Hannibal doesn't imagine it. He looks at this Will, here and now, willing to put himself in harm's way to stop someone who meant others around him harm. "Justice," he echoes back to Will.

Will looks down at their linked hands and gives him a small smile. "Maybe."

Hannibal cups his hand and leans down to kiss the back of his knuckles. He feels quiet, at rest. Will finally seems to have relaxed, too. Somehow, he'd needed this exchange. Hannibal can only hope, in the long run, it strengthens their newfound common ground.

Chapter 7

Will reluctantly pulls a decent sweater on over his worn Henley and picks up his truck keys. The dogs, already curled in their beds, simply watch him with what he imagines is sympathy. He owes Bev some drinks, and she's finally worn him down enough to agree to go out. He'll have to take it easy if he's to drive home again later. Maybe he can convince her to get dinner later. Anything to soak up a few whiskeys.

He parks up at the bar some fifty minutes later and finds Bev in a booth with a bottle of beer each and bowl of fries to share already waiting. She grins at his relieved expression. "I know what you're about, Graham."

"Yeah you do, but you forgot the shorts." He winks and goes over to the bar to order one for each of them.

Bev is smiling to herself when he comes back. "You're in a good mood. How's Heimdall or whatever he's called?"

Will groans and pushes her a shot. "Hannibal. He's fine. Jesus."

"Close enough. Tell me more."

"We're still...dating," Will grumbles, downing his own shot. At Beverley's eye roll, he offers, "I think it's going well. We - we have our misunderstandings but... we seem to keep sorting it out, which is more than I can usually say."

"Sounds like a relationship to me."

Will thinks about it as he sips his beer. "Been good couple months now. I guess it is."

Bev smirks at him. "You get all Louisiana when you're embarrassed."

"I'm *from* Louisiana," Will argues.

"Not like this." She pats his hand. "The good ol' Southern boy thing is super charming, I bet Henrik loves it."

"*Hannibal*," Will says.

"Bless you."

Will is going to murder her. "He wouldn't think much of this set up," he tells her, in what he hopes is a snotty and not at all fond way.

"What, beer and fries with me, your favorite federal agent?"

"I don't think Hannibal has ever eaten a fry," Will says wonderingly.

Beverly laughs. "Impossible."

"I'm serious, the other night he made *cailles en sarcophages* in my kitchen. Let me tell you what a shocker that was."

"I have no idea what that is, but that probably means it was a fucking big shocker," she laughs.

"It's quails," Will says, eating a fry tentatively, "in uh... sarcophagi. Little. Pastry ones."

Bev laughs. "Twisted! I'll try anything once, though."

"I guess they were like little roast chickens."

She's still laughing at him. He decides not to mention the pasta. Or the clementine cake. Instead, he changes the subject. It's easy enough to distract her.

They've been talking for at least an hour when Will's phone buzzes with an incoming message. He usually ignores them, but since he's been seeing Hannibal he's made an effort to up his communication, and today he hasn't had much time to check his phone. He pulls it out with an apologetic look at Bev. Then he blushes. "We got invited to dinner."

"We, as in me too? By who?"

"Hannibal is out with Alana. He knows we were having drinks and I guess they're nearby?"

Beverley looks at the fries. "Starter," she reasons, "who's Alana?"

"Mutual friend," Will says, reasoning that explaining how they used to date will only mean more teasing. Of course, only he could voluntarily go to dinner with his ex and current partner. *Great idea, Graham*. "Do you... want to? I don't want to pressure you into it," he says quickly.

"And miss out on seeing your boyfriend? Are you kidding?"

Will rolls his eyes automatically at the title. "All right, quick, finish your beer." He leaves the rest of his so he can drive. He goes to the bar to settle their tab, too, while Bev pulls on her leather jacket and fluffs her hair. She looks unusually excited. "Wipe that grin off your face," he tells her as they leave, knowing full well what the answer will be.

"No way, Graham. This is the most exciting thing that's happened to me all week."

"Please," he begs her, opening the truck, "get a hobby."

"What, like fishing? No thanks, I prefer living vicariously through other people's hot gay relationships."

He gives her the side eye. "We're not hot, stop that."

"Hot and heavy? Yeah right, you're not. Fine, I'll behave, but only because Hansel and Alana are probably way classier than me."

Will sighs. Of course she calls Alana the right name. "They're much classier than you," he assures her, pulling out of the parking lot, "and me for that matter. They're uh - both psychiatrists."

"Oh, goody." Bev grins and stretches her legs out in front of her.

"Isn't it?"

He has to pay attention to navigate to the restaurant Hannibal had named, but it's not far - nearly walkable, even. Inside, it becomes apparent he is extremely underdressed. Beverly at least has a nice silk blouse on with her jeans.

"Oh, shit," he mutters, taking a look around. Then he sees Hannibal and Alana, and the way Hannibal gets to his feet and smiles.

"Wow," Beverly says under her breath.

Will tries not to burst into flames. Hannibal looks as primped and chic as ever, hair slicked back and suit in immaculate deep blue with jewel tone accents. Will thinks of bruises. He thinks of the honeyed flash of Hannibal's eyes under the lights of his chandelier. God, he's in trouble.

"Will." Hannibal's voice is intimately warm when Will is within ear shot. He leans and kisses his cheek. "Thank you for joining us at such short notice, I hope we haven't impeded on your evening."

"Oh, Beverly is much friendlier than I am," Will says dryly. "Hannibal, Alana, this is Bev."

"Pleasure to meet you, Will has been grinning at his phone all night." She shakes Hannibal's hand, then turns to take Alana's. "Do I recognize you from somewhere?"

Alana tilts her elegant head. "Quantico," she pronounces. "I occasionally provide a guest lecture."

"That's it. I occasionally provide evidence for you to lecture on, I guess."

"Beverly," Alana repeats, with a twinkling smile. "I'll remember now."

"Trust me, so will I."

They take their seats at the table. Will is next to Hannibal, and Hannibal clasps their hands briefly under the table. "Good day?" Will asks softly.

"It is better now," Hannibal whispers back.

Will bites his lip to keep from grinning. Alana and Hannibal have already ordered wine, but the waiter comes to take orders from the rest of them. Will gets a soft drink - he can't really

have any more if he's driving - and lets Hannibal order his dinner when he realizes there's not much on the menu he recognizes.

Beverly smirks at him and displays a passable Italian accent when she orders hers. "Very fancy," Alana says from behind her rosé, "do you speak Italian, Beverly?"

"Enough to order food," she smiles. "I had a term abroad in undergrad."

"Where in Italy were you?" Hannibal asks, genuine interest lighting his polite tone up.

"Hannibal lived in Italy for a while as a student," Will puts in, at the same time Alana opens her mouth to say what he assumes is the same thing. They catch one another's eyes and Alana gives him a smile, small and approving.

Beverly is answering Hannibal, something about Naples and excavations at Pompeii, and it's fascinating but Will is

distracted. Alana is close to Hannibal. Pretty darn close. Close enough to come and lecture Will on hurting him. Her approval feels like a warm wind.

He looks at the table and diverts his auditory attention back to Hannibal. It's no hardship: he's an interesting guy.

Beverly is shooting him her own approving glances. All in all, Will is able to get away without too much actual

contribution; Hannibal and Beverly are excellent conversationalists, and Alana is as insightful as pleasant as ever.

Will is getting a strange, warm feeling in his stomach the longer he sits. It's confusing, almost distressing in its own right. He must shift, because Hannibal looks at him suddenly, eyes warm.

"How's your dinner?" Hannibal murmurs, attention completely shifted.

"It's not as good as what you last cooked me," Will says, honestly. Hannibal pinks a bit with his pleasure at that.

"You shouldn't flatter him so much," Alana puts in, fond, "he thinks enough of himself as it is."

"Maybe he should," Will says instinctively.

A hand gentles him. Hannibal's. "Alana is right, my ego has certainly gotten me in trouble before."

Will can't help smiling. "You're usually pretty humble around me. I guess there's not a lot of options when you're covered in dog hair and mud, huh?"

"Is that the secret?"

"I've always found it to be."

"Mm, well. You may have taken it to an extreme."

Will laughs. "Yeah. All right."

He realizes they've tuned out Beverly and Alana completely. When he checks, it seems they're in conversation of their own accord. That seems - fine, he supposes, a bit apprehensive. Alana, he notices, keeps tucking her hair behind her ear. She doesn't have many tells, Dr. Bloom, but he knows that one.

It's good to see her smile. Will sighs fondly and looks back to Hannibal. "I think we've been ousted."

They get dessert after their mains, even though Will's stomach protests after their "starter" at the bar before. He mostly just wants to enjoy watching Hannibal sip espresso and eat something in a delicate saucer. If he notices Will has abandoned his food in favor of staring at him, Hannibal doesn't give any indication of such. He can't make himself stop. Eventually, Hannibal's eyes flick to his own. Their gaze holds as Hannibal raises the next spoonful to his lips.

Will holds back a noise by force. He can't handle the tiny smirk that hides at the corner of Hannibal's mouth. This night may end differently than he'd imagined. Then he hears Beverly ask how Alana knows him and he's distracted.

She glances at him before she answers. "Will came to me for a referral a couple of years back and I was fascinated by him."

"We dated briefly," Will says dryly, since she hasn't. That makes Alana set her mouth in a thin line, not quite annoyed. He just didn't care for the way she'd said it.

Hannibal clears his throat at the following pregnant silence. "Let me get the bill, seeing as I commandeered your evenings." Under cover of the chorus of "unnecessary"s, Hannibal touches Will's wrist.

"Really, let me split it with you," Will says quietly, "please."

Maybe it's the 'please,' but Hannibal replies softly in the affirmative. They pay, and head out to the parking lot. Beverly nudges him.

"My turn next time, okay?"

"Sure, Bev," he replies. Alana is a short distance away talking to Hannibal. Will glances, then sighs. "Sorry about that."

"Sorry about flirting with your ex," Beverly replies.

"Hey, I just hope she likes you more than she liked me." He cringes at himself. "Sorry. Again."

Bev shakes her head. "Stop apologizing so much."

"You first." He claps her gently on the shoulder. "Thanks for tonight. I'll see you soon?"

"Yeah, definitely. Bring the boyfriend again sometime, he's interesting."

"More interesting than me, definitely."

"Not true. Now get out of here, that fine doctor is waiting for you over there."

"Don't you need a lift?" Will laughs.

She bites her lip. "Uh. Maybe not."

Will looks over Bev's shoulder at Alana, who's loitering with purpose. "... Ah. In that case, I don't feel bad not driving you home."

"No, I don't feel bad about you ditching me for your fancy boyfriend, either. Tell Hanson I said thanks again."

He shoots her a dirty look. "Take care, Bev."

When he looks back up, Hannibal is waiting by the Bentley with a soft smile. Will is only vaguely aware of his friends leaving as he heads toward him. Hannibal seems equally intent. Finally they're alone, or at least out of range of Beverly honking or catcalling at least, and Will leans into Hannibal with a sigh. "Hi."

Hannibal simply tips his chin up with a finger and kisses him. Will automatically sighs. "I'm glad to see you."

“And I you.” He touches his cheek. "I'm glad you said you'd meet us. Did you find it all right?"

"Of course it was."

"Your friend Beverly seems a very spirited young woman."

"That's a nice way of putting it," Will grins.

Hannibal's face glows with his smile, "It's good for you, I think."

"Yeah, I definitely need to be mocked and prodded more often." He smiles to show he's not serious.

"I believe when friends do it, it's called 'teasing'."

"If you're sure," Will drawls. He looks over at his truck. "I should get back to the dogs, I guess."

"I'd brazenly ask for an invitation, but my sister arrives tomorrow," Hannibal sighs.

Will is fully aware that the ugly swell inside him is jealousy. "I hope you enjoy seeing her. How long is she staying?"

"A week or two. I do hope you'll come meet her at some point."

Will bites his lip, struck. "I - are you sure?"

"Of course I am. Unless you're not."

Will is not sure at all, but the feeling fights with his consuming curiosity about anyone who knows what's made Hannibal… Hannibal. "I. Let me think about it. Is that all right?"

"Of course, Will. There will be plenty of opportunities."

Will nods, scuffing his shoes a bit. "Sure you don't wanna come back with me? I can bring you back here tomorrow, early as you want." He cringes a bit at how like a plea it sounds. But Hannibal doesn't hesitate either.

"I would like that, Will."

"But?"

"It would be very early."

"How early? You know I hardly sleep."

Hannibal smiles, a mix of fondness and concern. "At least we'll be able to watch the sun rise together."

Relief is such a foreign feeling to Will that he doesn't recognize it at first. He touches Hannibal's shoulders gently. "You're sure?"

"Entirely."

"Thank you..."

"Thank you for the ride home."

Will smiles. He takes Hannibal's hand. "C'mon. You sure you're okay leaving your car here?"

"I know the owners," Hannibal smiles. "It's safe here."

They get in the truck. Will feels unbelievably light at having Hannibal unexpectedly next to him. He's still getting used to it. He settles himself by picturing himself delivering Hannibal back to his car in the morning, suit a fraction less impeccable.

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Back at the house, Will lets the dogs out and tries to dust the stray bits of sawdust off the furniture before he lets Hannibal sit down. There's a nearly finished bedside table Will had

been waxing before he'd left that he trips over on the way to the kitchen. "Do you want anything to drink? Scotch?"

"I'll have one if you are," Hannibal murmurs.

"Yeah, okay. I have wine if you'd rather. Or cocoa." He flicks a glance at Hannibal to see how he reacts to that last. Amusement, mostly. Will retrieves the whiskey.

"Thank you," Hannibal takes the glass with a soft smile when he returns. Will goes to start up a fire. The dogs scratch to come back in, and Hannibal is still watching them settle when Will joins him on the sofa.

"All right?" Will asks, taking a sip of his drink.

"Happy," Hannibal replies. As ever, his honesty brings Will up short.

"Me too." He means it.

Hannibal reaches out and tousles his hair. "Earlier, when Alana didn't mention you had dated... I think she meant to protect you from scrutiny, not expunge herself of involvement with you."

"I know," Will sighs. "But I didn't ask for protection."

"Was it wrong of her to want to give it to you anyway? Your rebuttal was... somewhat aggressive."

"I know," Will repeats. "And I'm sorry. I just don't take well to that kind of thing."

Hannibal makes a noise of understanding. "You thought she didn't want Beverly to know because she was embarrassed."

"Stupid, really. How was she to know I hadn't already told her?"

"Will." His voice is patient, but gently reproachful.

"I know it was rude, Hannibal, I'll apologize." He shifts a bit, then lies across Hannibal's lap, petulant. "Are you done chewing me out now?"

"Yes," Hannibal says, ruffling his hair again.

"Good. I thought I was pretty well behaved for the most part."

"Of course you were," Hannibal replies. His fingers drum a gentle pattern on Will's chest.

Will looks up at him, petulance fading. All he can see is a slice of jaw and cheekbone and the corner of his mouth; then Hannibal looks down at him.

"Hey," Will says with a smile.

Hannibal smiles back. "Comfortable?"

"Very, are you?"

"Yes."

Will takes his glasses off with a sigh and Hannibal sets them aside for him. "Thanks, babe," Will mutters. He keeps waiting for Hannibal to protest the endearment, but he never does. In fact, he gently eases Will up and kisses him. Will curls his arms around Hannibal's neck, keeping their bodies pressed together.

"It's nice to see you relax, Will."

"It's easy with you.”

"I'm very glad to hear it."

"I think it's the same for you," Will says.

"Yes," Hannibal allows, fingers skimming under the buttons of his Henley gently. Will sighs, watching the motion.

"You look... I like this suit," he tells Hannibal.

"What do you like about it?" Hannibal hums.

"The color. Suits you."

"It would look good on you too. Rich colors compliment your fairness."

"I always look like I'm going to a funeral when I put on a suit."

"It might be your expression," Hannibal teases, pinching his chin gently.

"I have no idea what you mean by that."

"You generally look pretty unhappy to have to dress up."

"I... it just doesn't feel genuine. It's a lie."

"It's just a suit. We're always someone different underneath." Hannibal strokes his hair back behind his ear idly. "There's a concert at the Opera House next month. It'd be formal wear." Will grimaces. Hannibal falls silent. "It doesn't matter."

"You want me to come?"

"I'd only want that if there were even a slight chance you might enjoy yourself, which you clearly wouldn't."

"I'd... want to..." Will cringes.

Hannibal considers silently, then nods. "All right. It's no matter." He swipes his thumb over Will's cheekbone and sips at his whiskey.

Surprised by the intensity of the guilt he feels at disappointing him, Will scrambles. "If we went - it'd just be us, right? No fancy parties-?"

"We'd have our own box. I couldn't promise an empty bar at the intervals," Hannibal replies evenly. "You needn't exchange anything outside pleasantries with anyone."

Will chews on his bottom lip for a moment. "I could probably do that."

"Think about it. There's no demand."

Will nods hesitantly. "I guess I'm curious."

"I appreciate that, Will."

"And I do like seeing you in your fancy suits," Will adds. He tugs at Hannibal's tie gently.

"I can promise an extremely nice suit."

He lets Will tug his head down now. They kiss slow and soft, and Will feels full to bursting. He's so happy Hannibal is here. "If I get the dogs sorted, do you wanna come to bed?"

Hannibal nods. "Yes."

"Great." Will gets up and goes to see to them. Winston looks at him mournfully for a moment in the doorway and Will bends to stroke him. "It's okay, pal."

He guesses they're not used to sharing him. It's been happening more and more lately. Winston gives his hand a single, understanding lick and then goes to join the others.

Will returns to where Hannibal waits. "I can get you something to wear for bed if you want," he says, going to grab a hanger for Hannibal's suit.

Hannibal shakes his head. "I would like to feel your skin."

"Mm, of course you would," Will chuckles.

"Am I permitted?" he smiles sideways.

"Of course." He passes him the hanger and tugs up his sweater and shirt in one. He can feel eyes on him as he undresses, which is fair, because he watches Hannibal as well. He goes to let the dogs back in when he's down to his boxers, then settles everyone down. Hannibal is watching him from bed, looking soft and fond. "Don't laugh," Will chuckles, stoking the fire and then coming to bed.

"Never." He opens his arms for Will as he crawls into bed.

Will allows himself to savor skin on skin, as Hannibal had asked for. He's cool but Hannibal is like a furnace as ever. His hands soothe up Will's spine.

"I swear you have more knots in your back every time I touch you, Will. How's your shoulder?"

"It's all right."

"Have you made an appointment with a doctor about it?"

"Yes, but the soonest I could be seen was in about six weeks."

"It will be worth it if it gets you a referral, I suppose," Hannibal keeps soothing with his fingers.

Will nods, rolling more solidly onto his stomach to grant access. He feels Hannibal's amused huff on his skin. Will doesn't care how shameless it is. Hannibal slinks over to sit on his thighs and rubs his hands more firmly over his back. He sighs in contentment. "That's good."

Hannibal keeps massaging, hands circling wider.

"Does it bother you that this is eighty per cent of our time together?" Will mumbles. "Are you worried I'm just using you for massages?"

"Are you worried I have a massage fetish?" Hannibal asks, laughing a bit.

Will startles out a laugh. "Now that you mention it..."

"I certainly am fond of your shoulders."

"Mm, are you?" Will wants to blush, but the massage feels that good.

"All of you," Hannibal assures, "but certainly those."

"Yours aren't half bad."

"Goodness, high praise indeed." He pinches lightly at Will's side.

Will laughs. "You've got a nice ass too."

As he thought, it makes Hannibal trail his hands lower. "Is that so?" He leans down to put his lips to Will's ear. "What do you want to do with it?"

Without conscious thought, Will arches, a flush spreading through him under the prevalent haze of Hannibal's touch. "You know," Will mutters.

"I'm afraid I've rather forgotten."

Will wriggles. "You're lying. Don't you want me inside you?"

He hears Hannibal's soft exhale. "Very much so."

"Mm. I can make that happen."

Lips press to the center of his back and he sighs. Hannibal's hands are gentle as he strokes down his flanks. "Any time you want."

"Maybe it's about what you want."

"Well, then, I hope I've been clear. And enthusiastic."

Will rolls under him, settling down on his back with Hannibal over him. He reaches to pull him down into a kiss. "And so do I."

Hannibal sighs a laugh against his mouth. "Clear enough. Should I get you your things, love?"

"Please." He nods, sprawls lazily and watches Hannibal dig through his bedside. The shape of his broad shoulders and narrow back sets warmth spreading through Will, along with the sight of what's in his hands when he returns his upright position. With a smile, he kneels beside Will again.

"Allow me."

"By all means." Will can't help returning the smile. He arches as Hannibal strips off both their boxers and leans down to kiss the divot of each hip with tangible devotion. He slips the harness straps up Will's thighs with the same care. Next, he dresses the toy with a condom before sliding it neatly into place. When his hand wraps around it before he bends his head to lick at Will beneath it, it jars him from warmed up to searing. He makes a soft noise. Breathes out on Hannibal's name.

Hannibal hums against his skin before he drags his tongue up the underside of the toy. Will reaches for him automatically.

"Jesus," he mutters. He lets himself look at Hannibal, wetting his lips. "Get yourself ready," he orders softly.

Hannibal moves sleekly over him, picking up the lube and opening the cap. He obeys silently, with dark, liquid eyes never leaving Will's. It's humbling to see the way he moves. The flex and twist of his forearm as he obeys. His stomach muscles tremor, his tongue against his teeth. Will touches his thighs and hips and watches him greedily as he fingers himself open.

Mine, he thinks fuzzily.

They're both panting when Hannibal takes up the lube again to slick Will's cock. Will's hands find his waist, tugging greedily. Hannibal leans over when everything is ready, hands spreading against Will's ribs as he settles over him and slowly sinks down. He does it without more than a simple hitch in his breath, but Will can't look away. He's effortlessly gorgeous, body already gleaming with exertion. He's not above putting on a show, it seems.

Will hauls him closer; kisses him deep and moves with him hard. "Do you want more?" he mutters.

Hannibal nods fast, seemingly unable to speak. Will grips his hip with one hand and wraps the other around his cock. Hannibal sighs slowly.

"Will." His face slacks with pleasure.

Will turns their cheeks together and pull-strokes in time with the rocks of their hips. His own breath comes short just from the weight of Hannibal across his hips. He can hear Hannibal gasp; feel him working his hips harder into what Will gives him, riding his cock for long, aching minutes with his head tipped back and his cock standing flush against his belly, slipping between Will's fingers.

"Does it feel good?" Will whispers.

"It feels like everything I've wanted," Hannibal assures him softly, "I think of you like this, all the time-"

Will loves how his accent leans with the words. "All the time," Will repeats, not really a question.

Hannibal still makes a faintly pained noise at having it showcased. Will turns his head to kiss him.

"It's all right. Show me." He bridges his hips up sharply.

Hannibal curls a hand into his hair. "*Will*!" He pushes his face into his neck. Will feels his shakes starting. He strokes harder until he feels Hannibal spill. It triggers a sharp, sympathetic flood of arousal in Will, so strong he can feel the slick, like he can feel Hannibal's against his belly.

He squirms a little, hand still moving gently. Hannibal's weight is so welcome, so comforting. He wants more of his soft, wrenched sounds. He lets his fingers trail down to where Hannibal is stretched wide.

Hannibal lets him stroke at his skin; shivers when he turns his hips in gentle circles. Will nips gently at his shoulder. "Gorgeous."

Hannibal sighs out. He shifts slowly off Will, breaths still a little ragged while he unfastens the harness for him.

He goes to wash up, and Will opens his arms for his return. Their lips catch as soon as they're close enough to kiss.

"I think about you like that, too," Will murmurs.

"I remember."

They stay close for a long while. Will finds himself momentarily regretting that it's over - Hannibal isn't the only one who fantasizes about getting fucked. Even so, it's always incredible to watch him moving on Will's cock. Will fantasizes about that plenty. He sighs at

the thought, arching a little, and Hannibal pulls him closer. It takes only a little pointed wriggling for him to slide his hand down between them.

"My darling," Hannibal murmurs in his ear.

That makes Will turn pink. It doesn't make him hold still, though. He writhes up for the touch of Hannibal's fingers with a sigh.

"Oh, that's nice," he breathes. Hannibal strokes faster. Will groans and bridges up. "God - I need something inside me, please-"

Hannibal nips at the side of his throat and gives him two fingers to thrust down on. It's perfect, especially with the slow circling of his thumb against the tip of Will's cock. He rocks himself up into it at his own pace. The lazy press of Hannibal's mouth against his jaw and throat is maddeningly good.

"Will, Will," he says between kisses.

"Fuck, Hannibal - so good, you're perfect."

He fucks himself to a slow and shuddering orgasm in between presses of their lips. It keeps him under, trembly and warm for minutes after, clutching Hannibal in the dark.

Hannibal keeps him close. The fire pops and sputters in the grate as it dies. Will lets it go; the embers will be enough to warm them for a while yet. And besides, Hannibal is plenty warm enough. Will kisses his hair and lets himself drift to sleep.

*

Two days later, Will is sitting on his front porch with a cup of coffee, watching his dogs play, and he dials Hannibal's phone before he has a chance to talk himself out of it.

It takes Hannibal longer to answer than it normally might, but Will knows he's busy. When he does, his voice is warm. "Will. Your ears must have been burning."

"Why's that, Hannibal?"

"I was just showing Mischa the planters in the dining room. She thinks me quite the eccentric."

"You are," Will tells him fondly.

"You think it's charming."

"I do."

Hannibal breathes a soft hum of laughter. "Likewise. Can I help you with anything specific, Will?"

"I uh, I've thought it over these past couple days, and I think I would like to take you up on meeting your sister. If I'm still welcome."

There's a short, stark silence, and then Hannibal's tiny breath of disbelief. "Of course, Will. Nothing would please us more than to have you for dinner."

"G-good," he stammers. "Uh. When?"

"Perhaps Friday?"

Days away. Well, he surely has enough work to last him until then. The question is if the work is enough. "Sure, thank you."

"No, Will, thank you."

"It's... okay. I miss you." He closes his eyes. Did he say that out loud?

He hears Hannibal's breath catch. "And I you, Will."

It burns like a coal in his chest, needing to be stoked. "Guess I'll see you on Friday."

"I look forward to it." His voice is so intimate with genuine delight.

Will smiles. "Me too. Goodnight, Hannibal."

He hangs up the phone after Hannibal's answering fair well with a squirming feeling in his chest. He thinks it's sheer terror. Hannibal sounded so happy. Fuck, Will is in trouble.

He doesn't know how he'll make it to Friday, or make it through. He huffs to himself, then gets up and trudges to the shed: he's got work to do.

*

Getting ready turns out to be a process that eats most of his Friday afternoon. He changes three times; chickens out of shaving again. Picks up his bottle of aftershave and glares at it. Then he remembers what Alana said when they first started dating and opts for none. Thank god the truck is clean. There's a load of barn wood in the back, but nothing he can do about that now.

He bounces his knee nervously the whole way to Hannibal's. He's brought wine, but he suspects Hannibal will only care that he's brought himself.

Still, he was raised right. So, he knows, was Hannibal.

He answers the door in a burst of welcoming warmth, down to shirtsleeves and apron and smiling. Music plays in the background, more energetic than something Hannibal might choose. More modern, too.

Hannibal draws him in and kisses him, soft and familiar. "Hello, Will." He cups his cheek briefly. "Come in."

Will does, handing him the bottle from under his arm.

"So thoughtful," Hannibal murmurs. He gives him another brief kiss and then leads him toward the kitchen. "I'm just making dinner."

"I'd guessed," Will says. He takes a deep breath.

"Mischa is sous-chef," Hannibal tells him, as they go in, "Mischa, this is Will."

The woman at the island looks up, golden hair in a braid over her shoulder and Hannibal's tawny eyes. She smiles. "Hello, Will."

"Uh - nice to meet you." Will holds a hand out, and Mischa dries her hands on a towel before she shakes it.

"It's lovely to meet you too. This is a beautiful room, and I understand you did most of it yourself?"

"I just couldn't lift the countertops," Will says gravely, "would have if it had been an option."

Hannibal smiles at him. "Typical."

"Nothing wrong with having standards," Mischa says, amused.

"Thankfully, dinner will be up to Hannibal's and not mine," Will jokes.

"He'd have you believe he can't cook," Hannibal says idly.

"I have a reliable repertoire. It's small."

"Small is relative."

"Do you two enjoy bickering as much as it seems?" Mischa grins.

Will and Hannibal exchange looks. "Yes," they answer together, with varying degrees of resignation.

"Though that's not quite what I'd call it," Hannibal adds fondly, "we generally find ourselves quite well matched."

"Lovely," Mischa murmurs. Will turns his attention to her. She's as hard to read as Hannibal, and it's in different ways. Ways he hasn't learned. It makes him feel as stranded as he first had with Hannibal. No matter that she seems to be friendly. He has to try harder.

"Hannibal says you've been in Florence - do you live there?"

"Yes, for about five years now," she nods. "Prague before that, and -"

She looks to Hannibal, who supplies, "Denmark." He gives Will a clandestine smile. "My sister is incapable of laying down roots, it seems."

"Maybe she hasn't found the right spot.”

"She knows she has roots wherever her brother ends up," Mischa puts in mildly.

The siblings eye one another for a moment, silent and implacable but clearly fond. Will pushes down his faint jealousy at their easy closeness.

"Tell me more about Florence. What do you do?" Will asks.

"Currently, I paint."

"So do I," Will jokes, "but I sense you don't mean walls. What's your favorite subject?"

"Architecture, landscapes. The Tuscan hills are full of things to keep me occupied."

It sounds nice. It sounds like it doesn't have very many people in it, which suits Will just fine.

"You'd like it, Will." Hannibal sounds like he's reading his mind.

"You must be the reason Hannibal went into the forest as a boy, I can see," Will comments.

"I certainly was. He much preferred the library." Mischa sips her wine. "I assume you're the reason he goes into the forest now."

Will glances at Hannibal, stifling a blush. "Or the water." Hannibal smiles secretly into his own glass and Will watches him for a moment. "What's for dinner, Hannibal?"

"Lamb," he supplies.

"Sounds good. Anything I can do?"

"You can tell me about the antler chandelier," Mischa interrupts, "I'm fascinated to know how you put it together."

"Oh! Well. I didn't do much, I know a guy. I collected all the sheds for it, though. One of my dogs is good at sniffing them out."

"Do you see deer often then?"

"Oh yeah - I sometimes take leftover vegetables to the edge of the woods when it's fawning season. When it's misty some mornings they come right to the porch."

"It would be convenient if you hunted."

Will laughs shortly. "No, I'm just a fisherman. I like watching them, that's all." He looks down at his hands. "Not big on killing for the sake of it, and I never much liked venison."

"We grew up on it," Mischa says softly. "That or wild fowl. Didn't have much of a choice."

"For us it was fish," Will says stoutly.

She nods gracefully. "Needs must."

"Will," Hannibal puts in, "I've been terribly rude, I haven't offered you a drink."

"Oh, I - maybe with dinner? I can't drink too much if I'm driving."

"A soft drink perhaps. Or tea."

"Whatever you have, Hannibal. Water is fine."

Hannibal looks like he wants to fuss further but daren't. He fusses over refilling his sister's glass instead. He does at least pull a chair closer into their proximity and usher Will to it.

His hand lingers at the nape of Will's neck for a moment. It's a welcome anchor as the siblings' conversation flows like a river. Will tries not to let the metaphor overwhelm him. He's too easily distracted that way. He tunes in instead; lets himself enjoy it. Mischa spends a while asking him how he'd acquired each of his varied misfit dogs, face glowing as he describes them.

"I love dogs," she muses, "I think I'd have a cat if I ever stayed still, though. I think a dog might find me quite disappointing."

"So she just feeds strays," Hannibal puts in fondly.

That makes Will smile. "Strays need feeding."

"Exactly."

He hopes that's not how Hannibal sees him. His ears are burning at the thought, but Hannibal doesn't seem to notice. He settles his hand on Will's shoulder after Mischa has taken over stirring duty.

"Almost ready," he announces.

"It smells great."

"I hope you enjoy it. I'm glad you came."

"Thanks, Hannibal," Will murmurs. He's trying to be comfortable. It's harder than he'd anticipated. Nearly as hard as he'd feared.

Hannibal gives him another warm smile, and then goes back to the stove. Eventually he herds both Will and Mischa through to the dining room.

"It always smells divine in here," Mischa comments mildly when they're alone, "would you like a glass of wine now, Will, or should I get more water?"

"I'll take one, thanks."

She pours it delicately, with the same set to her pose as Hannibal. They're similar in many ways but so, so different too. Mischa is softer, less angular, easily smiling where Hannibal hides them. He thinks perhaps she's had an easier life. Hannibal is so much older.

He wonders if Mischa remembers that night. Not that he would ever ask.

"Thank you," he says, sipping his wine. "So how long are you staying for?"

"Another week, I think. You'll have him to yourself again soon enough," she smiles conspiratorially.

Will itches behind his ear, peeved. "That isn't what I meant."

"I know," Mischa replies.

Hannibal finally appears with heavily laden plates. The table setting is beautiful; so is the plating. As ever, the food is incredible too.

He does hear a few stories from the siblings about their childhood over dinner. Will is a quiet but appreciative audience. The occasional touch on his wrist makes him smile. Hannibal is close by, radiating warmth and contentment. This it seems is all he truly wants - Will, Mischa, a beautiful meal.

Will feels desperately affectionate toward him. That in itself would ordinarily send his nerves into overdrive.

"Will," Mischa commands his attention gently, "Hannibal tells me you grew up in New Orleans. I've always wanted to visit but never had the chance."

Will smiles. "I mostly grew up on the docks, but the city is beautiful, yes."

"Sailing? We never did much of that."

"Never too late to start."

"I suppose you're the man I need to see about that."

Will glances at Hannibal. "Will isn't a sailing instructor, he has a job," Hannibal scolds, without heat.

Will bites his lip. "I can check my schedule."

"It's not necessary if you don't have the time."

"We'll see," Will allows. In truth, he's reluctant to share a place that until now has been his private retreat - and then his and Hannibal's. He thinks Hannibal knows that. Maybe he feels protective too, because he changes the subject quickly.

He's charming as always. Mischa is charming too. Will feels outclassed but duly charmed. He accepts another drink during their mains: he shouldn't, but he could use the courage. Also, it

is perfectly paired. When they're finished, he stands to help Hannibal clear plates.

Mischa smiles and takes a moment with her wine. Hannibal lets Will follow him into the kitchen. As soon as the dishes are safely in the sink, Hannibal pulls him in by the waist.

"Hi?" Will grins a bit.

Hannibal leans in for a kiss. "Are you well?"

"I'm fine," Will murmurs. He touches Hannibal's tie gently. "Thanks for dinner."

"Thank you for coming."

"It's all right." Will looks down.

"No, I am sincerely glad, love."

"I know. Me too." He smiles at him.

Hannibal lets him lean. Will hadn't realized how much he'd missed his contact. It's only been days.

"My sister won't stop approvingly watching you," Hannibal whispers, "I apologize if you've noticed."

"I - thanks for telling me it's approving," Will flushes.

"I wouldn't want you to get the wrong idea. We've been accused of being facially ambiguous before." He smiles, and Will chuckles fondly.

"I find you more or less transparent nowadays."

"Do you?" Hannibal beams.

It makes Will smile compulsively. "I think so."

"What am I thinking now?"

"You're thinking Mischa has been sat on her own for a long time now."

"Well -" Hannibal can't deny it. "But -"

"I didn't say that was all you were thinking." Will stretches to kiss him gently. "Give me something to take back through with me."

Hannibal sighs and pulls him closer, kissing him with a thoroughness that makes him gasp. He's breathless, laughing with it when he pulls back, cheeks shot with color.

"I meant dessert or something-!"

Hannibal smirks. "No. Go sit. I'll bring it."

Will goes, light headed and blushing. Mischa, just finishing the last sip of her wine, looks politely unobservant. Sitting down, Will tries to think of a safe topic.

"Are you comfortable in your room?" Will asks. "Hannibal is determined to renovate the rest of the second floor but I'm not sure he's not being overly picky."

"It's perfectly nice," she hums, "though quite blue."

"It is, isn't it." They exchange a grin. "I'll work on it," Will mouths as Hannibal returns.

He's balancing three pretty summer desserts on his sleeves, handing them out neatly. He watches Mischa smile over hers and how Hannibal looks between them both. Will must be smiling too.

"These look beautiful, Hannibal," Mischa says.

"Taste," Hannibal urges.

She complies with an indulgent smile. "Oh, they're perfect." She hums. "They remind me of Marseille."

"So they do," Hannibal replies.

To Will, they taste like floral trifle, which is just fine. He feels suddenly out of his depth. He's never even left the States. He sighs softly.

Conversation between Hannibal and Mischa turns to books they've been reading. Will listens patiently. He hasn't read for pleasure for a while, but he keeps a mental list. He hates that it's another thing that makes him feel self-conscious. But so many things are. He just eats his dessert.

Hannibal brings them coffee, too, but suggests they take it into the study. He directs Will onto the sofa before he passes him his cup, joins him after serving Mischa. He looks so pleased to be here with them. Will sighs softly and touches his knee.

Hannibal links their fingers. "What are your plans for tomorrow?" he asks softly.

"Work," Will answers. "Got a wardrobe to finish off. Some patio furniture."

"Mine?" Hannibal murmurs, lips curved.

Will smiles. "Maybe."

"I'm most intrigued."

"Me too," Mischa pipes up.

"I wouldn't be, it's a table and some chairs."

"Your furniture is beautiful though - I looked at your website."

Will turns a bit pink at that. "My website. I kind of forgot about that."

"You're googleable, sorry." She smiles.

"My plans to vanish into obscurity, dashed by Squarespace."

Hannibal doesn't look at all surprised at any of this. "Like a forest spirit," he says quietly, "will I be able to summon you with the right offering?"

"Try and see," Will smiles vaguely. Hannibal's answering breath is vaguely disappointed. *Don't flirt in front of your sister*, Will tells him with his eyes.

Mischa seems quite unconcerned, but she does divert Hannibal's attention with music talk. That ends with Hannibal offering to play for them. Will hasn't seen him do so yet. He licks his lips. "Yes, please."

Hannibal seems expressionlessly delighted - it's more an energy he gives off than any facial tell. He settles at the harpsichord and flexes his fingers. Then Will can barely remember to breathe as he plays. Hannibal is never boastful, Will has found, and he's severely downplayed his adeptness for this. It brings up notes of spring behind Will's eyelids. He feels like he's been swept into a blooming field. He can see Hannibal there, playing with sunlight trapped in his blonde lashes.

He stares, rapt at the vision. There's a creeping darkness on the horizon, threatening the meadows. Hannibal always has a bit of darkness to him, doesn't he?

Will wonders absently what he would have become had he not saved Mischa. Glancing at her, the calm warmth she emanates, it doesn't bear thinking about. She looks very at home amongst the poppies and marigolds.

His imagination doesn't usually conjure flowers for Hannibal, just trees and fields and rich ripe fruits. It's the music, he thinks. He makes a disappointed little noise when it finally ends.

Mischa claps with appropriate gusto. "That's the piece you were working on last time I was stateside, isn't it?"

Hannibal nods.

"You wrote it?" Will asks.

"I did, it's occupied me for some years now."

"That's fantastic."

Hannibal doesn't quite emit light, but Will thinks he would be were he biologically capable. Will is dangerously fond of putting that expression on his face.

Hannibal sits back down to sip his coffee. "What, no encore?" Will teases.

"Perhaps later." He reaches for Will's hand and Will allows him to have it.

Despite Will feeling decidedly awkward, the conversation is easily redirected, Hannibal bearing the brunt. When he finally decides he can't stay any longer, he thanks Hannibal for dinner and tells Mischa politely how nice it was to meet her.

"And you, Will. I hope I see you again before I go. If not, take care."

So polite and undemanding. She's clearly taken her cues from her brother.

Her brother, who seems to have rather less of the undemanding about him tonight as he walks Will to his car. His hands are eager to wrap Will up and pull him close, and Will is okay with that. He can't help but laugh a bit when it becomes apparent Hannibal will not be the one to end their goodnight kisses voluntarily.

"Hannibal - it's rude to neck on your driveway."

"Of course it isn't," Hannibal smiles against his lips.

Will touches his shoulders helplessly, wishing he weren't so... compelling. "I have to go. I'll call you, okay?"

Hannibal lets him go this time. "Very well."

"Thanks again," Will says, opening up the truck.

"My pleasure, Will," Hannibal says quietly. He watches him pull out, as always, with an unreadable look on his face. Will is afraid to even try to decode it. He just drives, and tries not to think of all the ways Hannibal and his sister outclass him. Or the way Hannibal has stopped even trying to hide his need.

He can't decide which part scares him more.

*

It takes a few days before will is ready to call Hannibal again. He's careful not to ignore him completely, but he feels the need for time alone. If he works primarily on his furniture while he's holed up, that's probably only fair. It's not a feeling he can easily justify to himself. This little depression creeps on him in the way it always does, unexpectedly and unrepentantly. Disappointment in himself, the scent - and shame.

He spends the time he isn't working on long walks, deep in the woods with the dogs, later summer sun peeking through the foliage like stars. The first of the leaves are starting to fall, the trees weeping in fluttering clouds of rusted gold. Will walks, and thinks, and walks some more. He's been feeling stretched thin, and it helps, but he misses what's not here at the same time.

Understandably, Hannibal has taken his withdrawal with a quiet disappointment. He seems to understand why Will needs it, though, which is more than he's ever had before.

It's also more than he can say for himself. After a couple of drinks, and in a fit of self despair, he finally calls Hannibal.

"The concert," he says in a rush after their hellos. "I'll come. Tell me what to wear."

Hannibal sounds slightly taken aback, though obviously unwilling to challenge Will. "I'll get you something. We can choose together?"

Will knows Hannibal is better with suits than he has ever been, so he agrees.

Hannibal is quiet for a moment before he asks, gently, "Bad dreams, Will?"

"More than I had been having, yeah," Will grumbles.

"Is there anything I can do to help?"

"I don't know," Will sighs. "I just can't seem to snap out of this."

Hannibal is quiet for a second. "Can I bring you some dinner-?"

Will considers the pros and cons. "I'm not very good company right now."

"I am, though. I don't need an incentive, only to breathe your scent and confirm your reality again."

Hannibal always says things like that, and it never fails to take Will's breath. "Worried I've become noncorporeal in your absence?"

"Only as worried as I ever am."

Will bites his lip. "I've weathered worse alone."

"You don't have to."

Will looks out over the grass, pale waves of it under the rising moon, an ocean of soft blue. He sighs. "Sometimes it feels like I do."

"Only if you choose to."

"Come if it'd make you feel better," Will says finally, "but it's fine if it won't." He knows Hannibal will come.

*

Sure enough, he appears when Will has settled the dogs for the evening, the Bentley's lights cutting swathes through the falling dark. Will is waiting on the porch.

He's sipping his third whiskey. He feels more volatile than he'd wanted to, anxious to be seen this raw, but then Hannibal emerges smoothly from his car, a long shadow in the pale night, and he feels an ache lessen.

Will gets to his feet. Hannibal comes to meet him.

"Will," he says warmly, arms open. Will steps into the warm barrier of his embrace and lets himself feel it, just for a moment. Hannibal's hands soothe his shoulders. It's unfair of him, Will thinks, to keep doing this to Hannibal. He's not sure how to stop without severing all ties. And he can't stomach that.

"Will?" Hannibal sounds concerned. Will realizes he's clutching him slightly.

"I missed you," Will mutters.

"And I you. You're cold, let's go inside." He picks up a cooler bag and steers Will to the door.

In the warm, Will hovers with his drink while Hannibal sets to in the kitchen after dog greeting is complete. Buster seems particularly pleased to see him. Figures, his cranky Jack Russell loves Hannibal.

"If you bounce, you shall get no sausage," Hannibal tells him solemnly, as Buster does hopeful hops around his ankles. On hearing the tone, he immediately sits down.

Will cracks a smile. It feels good to be warmed by something trivial and sweet. "What did you bring us to eat?" he asks.

"I made Bouef Bourguignon."

"That sounds amazing." Will's stomach rumbles.

"Hopefully it will be." He gives him a smile.

Will sits obediently at the kitchen table. The whiskey is still there, and he pours them both a measure. "Are you staying?" he asks.

"Yes," Hannibal says just as simply.

Will pushes him the glass. He retrieves it when he's put the pot he's brought in the oven and come to join Will at the table. The way he leans his elbows on his knees and steeples his fingers toward Will thoughtfully summons his attention.

Will smiles over at him. "Refamiliarizing yourself?"

"Yes. Though I find my memory has served me well." He adds, after a beat, "Though usually in my memory you don't look so sad."

"Was that a question, Hannibal?"

"An observation. I wish you wouldn't feel so guilty all the time, Will."

"I don't," he mutters, "I'm just tired." Hannibal probably knows he's lying. "It's my dreams," he offers, reluctantly. "Just a lot to remember sometimes."

Silent for a moment, Hannibal reaches out and touches Will's curls, very softly, like he's afraid to hurt him. "I feel sometimes as if you walk alone in a great river of dead, their own

personal Charon. Do you consider it your duty to remember them, Will?"

"Yes, I think so," Will says after a moment.

Hannibal tilts his head. "And what do they give you in return?"

"Blood," he murmurs.

"That's not a fair trade, is it?"

"They lost their lives."

"You didn't kill them."

"I didn't save them."

"Being a detective is not a preventative measure. It is to give people justice. And you did."

"Sometimes."

Another careful silence. Hannibal shifts closer, voice very gentle. "You will carry your guilt for the rest of your life, Will, we all do - but if you can't learn to shoulder it more effectively, it will crush you."

"I don't know how," he whispers.

"Will you let me try to help you?"

Will bites his lips. When he meets Hannibal's eyes, they're soft and warm. "Yes," he whispers back.

The pleased smile he gets is reward enough. Hannibal doesn't press immediately, he asks Will about his furniture instead. Dinner will take a short while to reheat, so Will leads him out to the barn. They go hand in hand.

When the light is on, Hannibal is silent for a few minutes. "You've been quite busy," he murmurs finally, going over to touch a table.

"I ain't out here chewing straw."

"Really, Louisiana?" Hannibal smiles.

Will laughs. They lean together. Hannibal's hands find his waist, testing the span.

"Hannibal-"

"A little too lean at the moment, I think."

"You'll fix that too, I suppose."

"I hope so." He pauses, touches Will's face. "Not that I am telling you that you're broken, Will."

Will shrugs. "S'okay. I know it."

"You've been given challenges," Hannibal corrects.

Will shrugs again. "I'm all right."

Hannibal strokes a thumb over Will's cheek. "Perhaps we should go eat before we talk."

"Sure." He looks at the table again; the chairs not quite finished. "You don't like them-?"

"They're beautiful," Hannibal murmurs. "But I knew they would be. I didn't come here to see chairs."

"Well maybe not, but that doesn't change the fact I spent the better part of a month working on them." Will's ears go a bit hot, but he doesn't let his voice get sharp.

"I am - Will," Hannibal sighs. "I'm beyond touched that you'd make me something so wonderful."

Will sighs. "All right. Let's go inside." His chest is crawling with dueling sensations. Perhaps wisely, Hannibal doesn't push, just follows him back inside. The house smells of cooking and life again. It also smells of Hannibal's cologne. A soft, crisp spice that follows him from room to room. Will can feel the effect it has on him.

He's glad he's here. Even though he wouldn't have thought to ask.

He occupies himself with his drink while Hannibal gets on with dinner. Soon they have steaming plates in front of them, and Will eats with quiet appreciation. This is one of the best things Hannibal has made for him, he thinks, despite being so simple. Because it is, maybe.

Maybe he's just goddamn starving. He can't remember the last time he made more than - toast. An omelet maybe. Hannibal watches him eat with appreciation.

"It's delicious," Will tells him.

"I thought you might like it. I like to feed you," Hannibal murmurs.

"I know you do. Thank you," Will adds.

"Bed after we clean up?" Hannibal suggests.

Will shrugs again in agreement. Hannibal's answering scrutiny isn't irritated, but it's concerned again.

"We can talk," Hannibal murmurs.

"If you want."

"If you want," Hannibal echoes back.

Will sighs. "Sorry." He wishes he could stop saying it.

"You needn't apologize. You've done nothing wrong."

Will just shrugs and eats more of his dinner. He washes up after - it's the least he can do - and Hannibal covers up the leftovers to cool and opens the door for the dogs.

Will touches his waist when he goes to him afterwards. He's made sure his hands are dry.

"I was admiring the stars," Hannibal says, "the sky is so clear out here."

"Clearer than Maryland," Will replies.

"Hence the remark." It sounds almost snippy. Will gives him a look. "I like it out here," Hannibal says.

"I like you out here." They stare at one another silently for a moment. Will isn't as uncomfortable as he'd like to be. "Let's go to bed," he says.

"All right."

They walk into the main room and start undressing quietly. Will gets into bed in his boxers. Hannibal slips in after him. He's warm and solid and reassuring. Will lets himself be folded into an embrace and sighs with the rightness of it.

"What did you wanna talk about?" he mutters.

"Things I can speak to as a psychiatrist but not necessarily your... a romantic partner," he answers quietly.

"Dirty," Will comments.

"The workings of the brain? Undoubtedly."

"I'm listening, Doctor."

Hannibal sighs and strokes through his curls. "I believe you would find it beneficial to start seeing a therapist again, even if you think it won't work. Your previous therapy ventures have all been necessity. This one could be a choice you make, for your mental health." Will scowls automatically, but Hannibal soothes the lines. "It's a tool for your use. You're not being evaluated, nobody is going to declare you unfit for anything. I know that you're afraid, but you're not crazy, Will. You're simply struggling with the load you've been dealt, and seeing a therapist might alleviate some of that burden. Not me," he adds gently.

Will shivers a bit. "Maybe I'd prefer you."

"That would not be appropriate or helpful."

Will pouts up at him in the dark. "Who then? Alana?"

"Will." He sounds gently reproachful. "You know that wouldn't work."

"I need someone I can trust."

Hannibal watches him closely, his eyes flicking from feature to feature. Finally, he sighs. "Perhaps we ought to arrange something unofficial, then."

"You'll help me?"

"If you'd be more comfortable discussing these things with me then that's progress I'm happy to encourage, in the right setting." He sounds perfectly polite, yet clearly warm. He also sounds like he thinks it’s a horrible idea; like he’s placating.

Will thinks about it, then he nods. "Maybe you could assess me for a referral, so you know-who’s best."

“That would be a little less inappropriate.” Hannibal kisses his forehead, quick like he can't help it. It makes Will smile. He touches his chin.

"You're allowed to kiss me." Hannibal doesn't wait. Will drinks down the press of their lips, hungry for it - more than he realized. He should have known.

"I don't like people poking around in my head," he warns softly, when their lips part. Back when evaluations were mandatory, he could fulfil the criteria he needed to in order to progress to the next stage. Even with Alana, he'd only told her as much as he needed to; resisted further prompting. He has a feeling it won't be that simple with Hannibal, even for a simple assessment.

"I know," Hannibal murmurs.

"And what if I try to remedy things I don't want to talk about with sex?"

Hannibal simply looks down at him. "I know your tricks."

"Hm, we'll see." He feels irritation but no dread.

Hannibal touches his thumb under his lip gently, prickling the stubble there. "I'm sure we can find a happy medium."

Will isn't, but he's willing to be convinced. He pulls Hannibal down beside him with a sigh. "I just want to sleep right now."

"That's perfectly all right."

Will breathes himself to sleep. Having Hannibal's to synchronize with helps more than he'd care to admit. He gets back to sleep after dreams quicker, too. He's afraid of what that means. But he can't think about it too much.

*

He leaves Hannibal sleeping when the dawn is touching the sky, getting up to see to the dogs before they can wake him. He makes them both coffee and leaves a cup for Hannibal, taking his own outside. Dew on the grass glitters as the dogs rustle through it. Will sits down on the porch to watch the sun rise.

He feels more at peace than expected. If Hannibal were more like him - more reclusive, happy to be out of the city, maybe Will would entertain the fantasy of this being his life. But Hannibal's house... Will has furnished and built a quarter of it, and he knows just from Hannibal's taste and upbringing that he wouldn't be happy living the way Will lives.

Hannibal still clearly wants Will in his life. Will just isn't sure their lifestyles are compatible. Yet another thing that should probably come up in their - conversations.

He sighs at the thought. Hannibal’s right: therapy with him would be a terrible idea. Sad that it's the best option he can think of.

Stirrings from within the house. He sighs again. The swell of pleasure in his chest is what causes it. He knows Hannibal won't be able to resist coming and finding him, and that lights him up with a warmth he can't name.

It takes a few minutes though, while Hannibal fumbles for clothing and probably sips his coffee. He smiles when he feels him come to settle down beside him.

"Good morning," Hannibal says softly. "Did you sleep well?"

"Not too bad, thanks." He watches Hannibal smile.

"Me neither."

"Good." Will glances at his cup. "Need more?"

"Not yet, thank you." He reaches out to link their fingers. His hands are so elegant in the morning light. Will looks at the mist lingering amongst the fronds of grass and then back to the copper light on Hannibal's sharp features.

"Sometimes I'm not sure you're real," he says.

"I've had similar thoughts about you."

"We're quite a pair."

"Is that what we are?"

"Yes," Will sighs. Hannibal leans and kisses his knuckles gently, inhaling like he could evince the shape of Will's feelings through scent alone. Will is sure it's not that easy. He lets him though, sighing softly at the thought. "My pa never wanted me to talk about how I was feeling," he says grudgingly.

"I spent a lot of time a stranger to my own," Hannibal agrees. "It got easier when I accepted that I was human, and that emotion was a symptom of that. We react to the things that move us. What's moving you, Will?"

"Connection," Will replies.

"The want of it?"

"The strength of it," Will murmurs.

Hannibal looks at him, eyes warm and shining but face serious. "You might find it to be... inconvenient, I suspect."

"It's just new. You develop a way of dealing with being different, don't you, when you're like us? You say, 'I'm not broken, I'm better than everyone else'. You try to." Will wets his lips, self-conscious. "I forgot what it was like to feel - humbled by someone."

"Will." Hannibal’s eyes shine like amber.

Will escapes by looking into his mug. "It's true."

"I don't doubt that."

Will only lies when it will be to his benefit. "I feel understood when I'm with you," he adds. "And it's all I've wanted. And I don't trust it, because historically, I don't get what I want."

"Maybe it just wasn't the right time."

A little spike of resentment at that. "Or the right person, huh?"

"I wouldn't presume," Hannibal murmurs.

"Sure you wouldn't." He manages to keep it from sounding overly unkind, but he still pinches the bridge of his nose. "Sorry."

"No offense taken," Hannibal murmurs. He nudges their shoulders. "You probably know by now that I find your defensive barbs to be charming rather than unpleasant."

Will snorts. Of course. "You're something else."

"So I have been told. Usually by my sister."

Will smiles a bit. "She's like the mirror reflection of you."

"I've always rather believed so."

"I can corroborate."

Hannibal kisses his knuckles again. "What are you doing today? I've got appointments."

"I have a kitchen consult," Will says.

"Very nice."

"It sounds like a big job. Another good one for my portfolio."

"I'm sure you're the man to do it."

Will scratches his stubble. "Might need to hire help."

"It might be wise considering the physical strain. Do you have anyone you sometimes use?"

Will thinks. "Yeah. Guy called Peter."

"Perhaps you ought to give him a call."

"I think I will." Just the thought gives him a warm, relieved feeling. Peter is one of the few people whose presence doesn't make Will even more tense. And Peter could use the work.

"You're smiling," Hannibal tells him.

"I like Peter. Haven't seen him in a while."

Hannibal smiles too. "A friend of yours rather than a tradesman?"

"Yes," Will decides. "He's a friend."

He can't quite describe the look on Hannibal's face - a minimal twitch of features that speaks a multitude of languages. Not least among them are envy, and a degree of pleasure. Both of those ring true.

"You can't decide if you like that I have a friend. You're mad you didn't know about him?" Will guesses.

Hannibal huffs softly. "That's reductive."

"But accurate."

"Possessiveness is irrational but it's natural. An instinct lingering from the dawn of man, I suspect. Does the realization of gaps in our lives before one another never strike you as irksome?"

Will snorts softly. "Irksome." Despite his teasing, Hannibal waits. "Maybe I'm possessive too," Will finally relents.

"I know that." At Will's scowl, he hums a low laugh. "You seemed quite perturbed at my and Mischa's bond at dinner. You hid it fairly well."

Will shakes his head. What he doesn't say, or let himself think, is - more possessive thoughts. "I wasn't jealous you did have it. Just... feels like standing outside looking in. Never had that."

Hannibal's expression is understanding. He winds an arm around Will slowly and they sit quietly for a few minutes. Overhead, the clouds draw in over the yellow blue sky, promising rain.

Chapter 8

Will agrees to meet Hannibal at a tailor shop that Friday afternoon. He's nervous, exceptionally so, even though he knows Hannibal would only patronize the best. It's not the quality of the work he fears - it's being looked at. It's standing in his underwear with his scars on show. He can handle this. He can.

Drumming his fingers nervously on the wheel where he's waiting, Will tries not to let his imagination show him all the ways this could go. He's faced worse. He tries not to think about that either. Hannibal wouldn't take him anywhere that wasn't accepting.

The Bentley pulls up before he can worry too much more. They meet on the pavement, and Hannibal greets him with the usual warmth, taking his hands in his own and squeezing.

"Hello, Will."

"Hi," he breathes. "I'm nervous."

"I can tell." Hannibal squeezes again. "I'm not."

Will bites his lip, then steps closer into him, sighing when Hannibal curls a welcoming arm around him.

"I wouldn't ever knowingly put you in a situation where you could to any harm, I promise. It won't be as bad as you think it will. Come, now," he adds softly.

Will nods and follows him inside. The shop is quaint and neat, not as extravagant as Will expected. There are a few fine suits on mannequins dotted around, both Western and Eastern fashion, some fabric samples on a desk. Other than that, it’s just a curtained fitting room and a footstool. And apparently deserted. Will tucks his hands into his pockets with barely concealed agitation while Hannibal politely waits.

The figure that eventually emerges from the office is wizened and gives a mere half-smile at the sight of Will. She's wearing a beautiful blue sari that brings out the silver tones in her hair, and she greets Hannibal with a warm smile.

“Doctor Lecter, how are you?”

"Madame Varma," he replies. "Please allow me to introduce Will Graham."

"A pleasure," she tells him more warmly, voice rough with age. She shakes his hand.

Will shakes back, dipping his head. "Thank you for seeing me on short notice."

"Doctor Lecter is a dear friend, it's not an imposition. Come, take off your shoes and coat and let me have a look at you."

Will obeys and allows himself to be steered onto a platform. Madame Varma makes conversation with Hannibal while she hangs Will's coat, asking after Mischa. Then she starts quizzing Will about colors and fit, formal occasions.

"Oh - I don't wear suits often, this is just - an evening. The opera?"

"Ah, yes." She nods a few times, then starts pulling bolts of fabric.

Will looks at Hannibal, who is uncharacteristically quiet, though smiling. "Any opinions, Doctor?"

"I think Madame Varma will take good care of you. She has a better eye for color than I do."

She looks especially amused at that. "Flatterer," she says.

Hannibal gives one of his not-quite-smiles. Will thinks he likes this woman very much.

"I think he would suit a good red," she says, "certainly browns too, or even a jade grey." Will watches the bolts of fabric she indicates. Then she looks up at him. "Which do you like the look of?"

He's drawn to the dark grey, with a subtle shark like sheen to it. "Maybe that one."

"Or this?" Hannibal murmurs. Will peers at where he's pointing. It's a midnight-dark claret. Will thinks he's seen Hannibal in something similar, and as a result he's almost certain he would look insane in it.

"It would go with your dark coloring," Madam Varma agrees, "and make your eyes stand out. Flattering to the figure too, not that you need any help with that. I'll pull samples of both," she decides.

"Thank you," Hannibal and Will say, in unison. Will blushes.

"Don't think I'm getting two," he warns. Hannibal's smile grows despite it.

"Madame Varma will keep your measurements."

Will stands obediently still until she brings him a crisp silver dress shirt. "Put this on."

"Should I keep my jeans on-?"

"Might as well undress." She waves him to the fitting room.

"For your measurements," Hannibal reminds him. Will isn't sure why that means he has to put a shirt on, but he does as he's bid.

Back on the platform, he feels silly in his black boxer briefs and the silver shirt, which is made from the nicest cotton he's probably ever touched. He daren't look at Hannibal. The madame brings back two dummy jackets in similar colors to those they'd mentioned. Slipping the grey one over his shoulders, she clips it in back to adjust the fit and then turns him toward

a mirror...and Hannibal. He's watching with an entirely blank expression, but Will knows better.

"Well?" he says, lifting his arms a bit.

"Some trousers might complete the look."

"The color, Doctor," Will scolds.

Hannibal fights a smile down. "Very austere. Tasteful and classical."

"Will it do for your opera?"

"It would certainly do. Try the claret."

Of course. Will turns to Madame and allows himself to be unclipped and redressed. This time, she finds him trousers. They're closer to his size - the grey suit jacket had been much too large - and so the illusion is more complete.

This time, Madame Varma turns him to the mirror. "Never mind what he likes, tell me how you feel."

Will takes a breath and looks. "I feel overdressed," he deflects.

"Certainly it's more clothing than the last," she says with a spark of humor.

Will sighs. "They're both - better than I expected."

Finally he looks at Hannibal. As anticipated, it's a mistake. "We could have-"

"Hannibal, I don't need more than one suit."

"As you say," Hannibal murmurs.

Will can see him exchanging glances with Madame Varma. Clearly, this is the one. And it doesn’t make him look mad at all. It makes his eyes icy and his hair glossy sable.

"It's not quite the same fabric, yours will be richer. Aubergine would go well."

Will bites his lip, staring at his body in the mirror, avoiding the face. Over his shoulder in the reflection, he sees Hannibal still watching. His expression is fond and a little lost. Will can't fathom what he's thinking. It’s not like him to be so opaque. At least not to Will. Or perhaps he just doesn't want to acknowledge what he's seeing.

He knows, though, deep inside, in the parts of him as dark and sanguine as the suit. He looks at them both perfectly incapsulated in the triptych shaped mirror, and he sees love writ upon both of them.

It feels like a knife in some soft part of him. He's so afraid of it; of what Hannibal could do to him. Steal away from him and never come back. No more warmth, no more sun kissed

shoulders, no more dark eyes. It's enough to make his breath stall in his chest: the first seizes of panic.

He turns away from the glass, eyes stumbling over Madame in her sari like an ocean wave crashing.

"Will-?" Hannibal moves toward him at once, covering the distance in three long steps.

"It's - just dizzy-" Will lies.

"All right, come down from there." Hannibal steadies him and guides him off the step, pulling the clips off to loosen the jacket.

"Let me get you some water," Madame Varma says softly, disappearing from view. Will's head still spins; he grips Hannibal tightly.

Hannibal talks to him, voice soothing, hands unbuttoning the jacket. If he notices Will's white-knuckled grip, he doesn't mention it, just guides Will to the platform to sit him down, crouching in front of him on one elegant knee.

"Any other symptoms?" he asks with quiet concern.

"Just - just short of breath, I don't know, I - I pulled a muscle yesterday maybe it's just... cramp."

Hannibal’s hands are already traveling to his much-abused shoulder, gently probing. "Was it here? Or somewhere else?"

Will touches his chest where he feels the tightness yet to subside. Hannibal's hand covers his, over his heart.

"All right," he murmurs. "You’re all right. Just take a moment."

"Yeah. Stay here with me-?"

"Where else would I go?" Hannibal reaches for the water, lets Will sip it slowly.

The words play themselves back to Will on a delayed loop and he flinches at himself. "I'm sorry," he says, "I'm fine now."

"Why are you apologizing?"

"Embarrassing," Will mutters.

"There's nothing to be ashamed of, you're having a physiological reaction to something outside of your control."

He surely fucking is. "I'm better now."

The warm smile Hannibal gives him is nearly enough to get him hyperventilating again. "Good."

"Measurements now?" Will asks, turning to Madame Varma.

"Yes, you can get undressed."

He does as she asks, gets on the platform again. Hannibal has retired to the nearby chair, politely diverting his attention. Will is glad for it. The last thing he needs is Hannibal's bedroom eyes adding to this fiasco.

Madame Varma is both polite and scrupulously thorough. Will feels physically inventoried; slightly apprehensive of the fact. Her expression never changes, though.

Eventually she stands up, satisfied. "All right, Mister Graham."

"Done?"

"Yes, your suffering is nearly at an end." Her eyes smile up at him, mouth barely curved.

He manages a little, embarrassed laugh. "Nothing you've done, trust me."

"Nevertheless. Feel free to get dressed, young man."

Will does, quick enough that he can see Hannibal failing to suppress his amusement. Madame is still scribbling in her notebook, some arcane calculations he's afraid will add up to a price he's not quite ready to hear.

Hannibal stands to touch Will's elbows, meeting his gaze. "Will you allow this to be a gift?" he asks, politely quiet.

"No," Will says, fondly. "You know I won't."

"I had to try."

"It's - it's very sweet of you to offer," Will gives his side a quick squeeze, "thank you."

Hannibal nods and turns away. God, he's offended him. Will wonders what it's like not to be the worst partner of all time.

"You'll be gorgeous," Hannibal says finally, still looking at a display of ties.

Will turns pink, watching him. "Hannibal," he murmurs.

His attention is like a spotlight. "Will?"

"You'll help me pick a shirt and tie?"

"Of course. I think Madame Varma is right about the eggplant shirt, though a coffee brown would accent it very well." He touches the back of Will's hand. "You'll look like a prince."

"Stop," Will laughs. "I'll look like I got lost."

"You stop," Hannibal murmurs. His eyes scrape over Will's mouth.

"Or what?"

"Or I'll keep telling you what I think, and you don't like praise."

Mollified, Will closes his mouth with a near pout. By the time Madame comes back with a price and a timeline, he's gathered his wits about him again.

At the desk, he puts down his deposit and she gives him a handwritten receipt with a flourish. He lets Hannibal escort him out after that, back to the parking lot and their mismatched cars. They're both quiet. Will is still a little mystified at his own feelings.

"Do you have time for a drink?" Hannibal asks after a moment.

"Yeah. Yeah, sure."

"I know a place a block down. We can leave our cars."

"Sounds good." Will follows him with a smile, settling into step with him.

The inside of the bar is cool and dark. Quite fancy, Will thinks, more of a cocktail bar than anything. But it's humble enough that Hannibal goes to the bar for their drinks after settling Will at a cozy, private booth.

Will enjoys the moment of solitude, honestly. His thoughts are a sandstorm, burying some things and unearthing others. He thinks some should stay buried.

Hannibal rejoins him with their glasses, sitting opposite Will like he senses he needs the space. They both sip quietly for a moment. Eventually, Will picks his straw out of his drink and fidgets with it nervously.

"Are you upset that I wouldn't let you buy my suit?"

"No, Will, I'm not upset."

"Wanna tell me what you are?"

"Proud of you for setting boundaries, truthfully."

Will wriggles his shoulders. "I thought boundaries were my specialty."

"Do you feel that way?"

"Not really with you, now you mention it." He smiles.

Hannibal smiles too. "Should I apologize?"

"Not on my account."

"Good." He covers Will's hand gently with his own. "I just want everyone to see you how I see you," he murmurs.

It makes Will flush again despite himself. He feels like a child. "I know. I only care what you see, not what they see."

Hannibal studies his face for a long time. Will feels as if he's in an MRI; as if Hannibal can peek through all the layers and fissures of his brain and find something there that no one else can. It's oddly reassuring. Maybe not so odd. Who doesn't want to be understood, after all?

"Okay?" he asks uncertainly, when a minute or more has passed.

"I have so many versions of you in my memory, but I always want one more."

"You can have one more. You can have as many as - as many as I can give you." He has no more words he feels capable of saying. Maybe Hannibal doesn't need more than that.

He deserves more, though. Will turns his hand up underneath his on the tabletop and loops their fingers.

"I'm kind of excited to see your face when I put this suit on for real, y'know."

"Are you?" Hannibal looks amused.

"Yeah. You already looked ready to float off just for the fitting." He imagines he can see a faint flush on Hannibal's cheeks.

"It's not polite to make fun," he says.

"Is it making fun if I liked it?"

"I think it might still fall into the category."

"Oops." Will lifts his hand and kisses the back.

Hannibal's expression is unmistakable. Lovesick. He cups Will's chin gently in his hand. Neither of them move for a long time.

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After Will goes back for a solo alteration session, Madame Varma has the suit ready by the promised date, and Will can't stop staring at the bag as it hangs on the back of his door. Part of him - a big part - wants to try it on. Wants to show up at Hannibal's in it: let him peel it off him so he doesn't have to go to this goddamn opera. Even so, he resists.

To distract himself over the days leading up, he works hard; sleeps early. One night he gets a text from Bev that simply reads:

<<You are the worst friend ever, I haven't heard from you in weeks.>>

>>I really am.<<

He means it wholeheartedly. The phone rings in his hand, and he sighs fondly before he answers. "Bev."

"Oh, so you *didn't* lose your voice and dialing fingers in a freak boating accident."

"I might have."

"But you didn't. What's going on? I left you a voicemail a while back."

"I've been working my ass off, that's all."

"Right, okay." Bev doesn't believe him. That's fine. "Alana is worried about you. Maybe check in with her?"

Will sighs. "I will. Promise."

"All right. Roasting over. How are you?"

"Operating this brain is terrible and I want a replacement. Hannibal helps a little. That's the pertinent stuff."

"The second part sounds good. First part bad. Anything I can do to help?"

"Checking in with me helps," he admits grouchily.

"So call me back sometime, right? Work with me here."

"Sorry." He scowls, kicking a bit at the decking where he's hunched with the dogs despite the chill. "What's new with you, anyway? What's new with *Alana*?"

"You're such a brat," Bev tells him, despite totally deserving to be teased.

"Don't change the subject."

"Well, if you're asking if I went out with Alana, then yes."

"Yeah yeah, tell me something I didn't know."

"It didn't end in flames?" Bev laughs. "I don't know, Will, she might be too classy for me, but she likes me."

"She is too classy for you, but Hannibal's too classy for me and I guess it's working out all right."

"Is it?" Bev sounds pleased.

"Yeah, I think so. I mean..." he pauses. "I'm... I think I'm scared he's gonna get sick of me. I'm worried he is already."

"I realize I've only met him once but...doubt it," Bev says.

"Yeah, you'd know better than me."

"Will Graham, sarcasm is cheap."

"I'm cheap."

She snorts. "Sure you are."

Will looks at the receipt for his suit on the fridge. "Okay, maybe I'm not. We're going to the opera tomorrow."

"Damn. Enjoy that."

"I am anticipating not enjoying it."

"Then enjoy your man enjoying it and make him blow you later?"

It startles a horrified laugh out of him. "Beverly."

"What? You'll enjoy that."

"I do not use bad nights out as leverage for sexual favors. I don't *need* to."

She snorts. "Now the truth comes out about why you're not answering your phone in the evenings."

"Ha ha," he says dryly. After all, she can't tell if he's blushing. "Hannibal's an esteemed Doctor," he says, a little defensive at the thought of her speculation, "it ain't a rodeo here five nights a week."

"I know you better than that anyway."

"Yeah, then you know I'm bad at teasing," he pouts.

"I know that too."

"Coulda fooled me."

"Will," she laughs. "Relax."

"If only it were that easy." He drums his fingers on the porch rail. "I'm nervous."

"I know. You'll be fine. Believe in yourself."

"Did you just read that off a fortune cookie?"

"One of those motivational posters, actually. Too much?"

"Only if I don't get a copy of the poster."

Beverly snorts. "Check your mail. I'll talk to you soon, okay?"

"Okay. Tell Alana I'm okay, right?"

"Do it yourself, brat."

"Now who's the worst friend ever?"

She makes a kissing noise and hangs up on him.

Will spends the rest of the night re-evaluating whether he truly needs human interaction to be happy. Winston cuddles up to his side as if to convince him he has everything he needs.

"He does bring you sausage," he says, matter of factly. Winston's tail whaps against the mattress. "Yeah. That's what I thought." He smiles despite himself. He can do this.

*

When the night comes and he's dressed in his new suit, he tells himself the same thing again. Whatever he thinks about the man in it, he can't deny that the suit is luxe on a new level, immaculate lines and perfect accessories. He even got brogues for the occasion. He's groomed his beard and tamed his hair with some stuff Bev likes. He's ready.

He's finished Hannibal's garden furniture too, and it's tarped over in the bed of the truck ready to go. He drives with his suit jacket hung in the back seat, and wonders if this is how Hannibal feels every day. Somehow, he doubts Hannibal notices. God, he's dating an actual gentleman.

The sight of him waiting on his side porch - clearly because he'd heard the truck rumbling up his drive - is rather

breathtaking. His suit is devastating, and so is he, hair neat and features like the angles of a church facade. Will shields himself from view with his car door as he shrugs into his jacket, advancing on the porch when he's put together. It's worth it for the way Hannibal takes him in as he approaches, eyes gleaming.

"Will," he murmurs. "You are exquisite."

"What have I told you about lifting my lines?"

"My sincerest apologies."

Will beams and leans to kiss him. "Hello. You look like a movie star. Are you ready to go?"

"I am." Hannibal takes his hand and kisses his knuckles gently. He leads Will over to the Bentley and opens the door for him. Everything about him is so sleek and swift. Including the way he keeps sneaking looks at Will.

"Guess I'll put this on your Christmas list," Will says.

"What's that?" Hannibal hums.

"Dinner in a fancy suit."

His next glance is warm. "If you wish, I would enjoy it very much."

Will smiles and nods. "We'll see what we can do."

He makes quiet conversation with Hannibal for the drive into the city. It's still tingling in his spine, the mention of Christmas - will they be together that long? He can't help imagining it: the snow, a fire, the smell of Hannibal's cooking permeating the house - either of their houses. It makes him swallow a knot in his throat. God, why can't he just turn his brain off for one night?

He can feel Hannibal's attention on him even though he's watching the road. "How was your day?"

"Good. I brought your furniture over, that's what's in my truck."

"I feel very spoiled indeed," Hannibal says.

Will smiles. "Do you."

"Certainly."

"I'm happy to hear it, Hannibal."

Hannibal's hand settles on his knee gently for a moment. "Don't worry. I'll protect you."

Will wants to scoff. "It's more you I'm worried about."

"Don't. There's no need."

"Yeah? You might have a few less friends by the end of the night."

"If I do, I don't want them. End of discussion."

Despite the abruptness of his tone, Will knows he means it only as a testimony to how strongly he feels for Will. It makes him burn pink in his seat.

"Thanks."

Hannibal touches the back of his hand. "Always, Will."

They fall silent as Hannibal drives up to the opera house and deals with the valet parking. With Hannibal's hand firmly in his, Will feels braver than he thought he would as they go inside. He doesn't stand out in his deep red suit, though it's certainly not the most conservative outfit in the room. He's grateful to be somewhere in the middle, strangely. Being noticed is surely better than being a mediocre partner to Hannibal's immaculate outfit.

Hannibal is definitely being noticed, but he avoids most conversations beyond a quick greeting. All for Will's benefit, he knows.

"Drink from the bar?" he murmurs after they make their way across the lobby.

"Please," Will follows him closely, unable to keep from looking around despite himself. There are a lot of sparkling cleavages and he is just one man. The eye is naturally drawn. Tearing his eyes back from a waterfall of diamonds, he accepts a glass from Hannibal politely. It's a cocktail, sweet and bitter, a whisky base. It's delicious. "Wow, thank you."

"The mixologist here is excellent. I will take you to one of the restaurants where he developed the bar menu some time."

"Do they have a dress code?" He jokes, fidgeting with his collar.

Hannibal smooths it down himself. "Ties, no trainers."

Will takes it in, then shrugs. "Fair, I guess."

"Stop worrying," Hannibal repeats, "come on, I'll show you to the box."

"Let's go," Will agrees, taking his arm.

He can't help but notice a few of the stares that come their way. More now that they're in the smaller bar area. Hannibal seems not to notice, but he keeps guiding Will upstairs anyway. Maybe he is trying to protect him.

The lights flicker as the enter their box. "Jesus, you don't do anything by halves, do you?" Will whispers.

Hannibal smiles slightly. "Why would I?"

"Good question." And so typical. Will smiles as the theatre lights dim. Immediately, Hannibal's hand finds his again in the comforting dark.

The music might go over his head but watching Hannibal doesn't. He's as beguiling as ever, but now he's not conscious of Will watching him. So Will indulges. He can think of worse ways to spend two hours.

Unfortunately, there's an intermission.

"Another drink?" Hannibal says. He looks a little bleary, the way Will feels after absorbing too much of the atmosphere.

"I'm fine, but if you like."

"I would like. It will give us a chance to stretch."

Will nods and stands, straightening his coat and tie and smiling at Hannibal's expression.

"Still perfect," he assures Will.

"So are you." Will can't stifle a sigh. No one here can claim a date like Hannibal. His arm slinks around Will's waist and he presses a clandestine kiss under his ear, casually possessive. Will hums softly. His stomach is swimming a bit. He turns his cheek, and Hannibal is watching him closely.

He leads them back out into the lobby, to the bar again. Will's second cocktail goes down just as easy as the first and he keeps his smile in place as a few of Hannibal's acquaintances approach him. They're polite, but they're all curious. He's surprised when Hannibal actually lights up to one of them - a serene faced blonde woman with a distinctly cool aura.

"Bedelia, as I live and breathe. I thought you had retired from society," he greets, voice suffused with pleasant teasing.

"I was sure you had as well," she murmurs.

"I still find it diverting on occasion. Bedelia - this is Will Graham." He touches Will's shoulder indicatively. "Will, this is Bedelia Du Maurier, longtime friend and colleague."

"Mister Graham," she replies, inclining her head. For some reason, she doesn't seem surprised to see him.

"Uh. Hello," he replies.

She extends an elegant hand and he clumsily shakes it, sparking amusement in her eyes. "A beautiful suit," she comments.

"Oh. Thanks? Are you enjoying the music?" he glances at Hannibal for help.

"Opera is an acquired taste. Some are more palatable than others." Her gaze is refreshingly steady, not flicking all over. It's still making him flinch – all the noise in here is, so loud now the shroud of the music has been lifted. Everywhere Will looks there are people, talking and laughing and making signals with their bodies his mind starts to decode without his permission. *Affair, affair, divorce, affair, white collar crime.*

"Yeah, I'm not sure it agrees with me yet." He suddenly feels a bit hot. Bedelia asks Hannibal about work and Will realizes with the same rush of annoyance he had when he watched him interacting comfortably with Mischa that he's entirely too used to having Hannibal to himself. Fuck, he's jealous. Jealous and desperately dumb in love. He's sure there's nothing wrong with Bedelia Du Maurier, but he's practically twitching with the desire to say something rude. Just to get her away. Why would he do that? Why would he want to isolate Hannibal? So he's as miserable as Will is? Fuck. He needs to walk.

"Excuse me, I need to use the restroom."

Hannibal smiles to acknowledge him. In the softly lit washroom, Will shuts himself in a stall and breathes hard for a minute against the bubble of fear that rises in him. Why is he like

this? Emotionally stunted, cripplingly self-contained. He's turning into his father after all. Fucking bad genes he's carrying.

The thought makes him thump the stall door. He draws in slow breaths, counting in and out, trying to fight the general terror response in him to *run*. The panic creeps in like a weed. He looks at his cufflinks for distraction; keeps looking at them until the noise fades out. That is, until a soft knock at the stall door jolts him.

"Are you all right, Will?"

He unlatches the door immediately. "Hannibal?"

The face on the other side of the door is concerned. The low light makes him look even more chiseled. "I thought I'd bring you your drink. May I come in?"

"To the... stall?"

Hannibal doesn't appear to be joking. Will steps back, curtailing his disbelief. After handing him his drink, Hannibal simply perches on the lid of the toilet after hitching up the knees of his dress pants like they were conducting a business meeting.

"Would you like to leave, Will?"

Will pauses with his glass to his lips. "How - how did you -?"

"You have barely spoken since we got here." He holds a hand up when Will opens his mouth to protest. "Please don't mistake me. I'm not upset with you. I can come to the opera any time I please, and regularly do so."

Will sighs and knocks back a mouthful of his drink, then holds out a hand to help Hannibal to his feet. "I'm sorry, I cannot have this conversation in here."

"I assumed, since you'd taken up residence in here, that you might be in need of an enclosed space."

"The opposite, really? Does this place have, like... a smokers porch? It has to, right? Gross old man cigars and all that?"

"There's a courtyard."

"Show me," Will says, taking his elbow.

Hannibal doesn't move. "Will. We don't have to discuss it. If you want to leave, we'll go now. I don't require you to make a case."

"Maybe I do!" Will hisses. "Do you think I want to be like this?"

He sees Hannibal judder, taken aback by his tone. "I see nothing wrong with you. You're uncomfortable, and that's the last thing I want. It's as simple as that."

"Hannibal," Will pleads. "How can you not care? This - you wanted this, and I'm ruining it."

"You've ruined nothing. You went to a fitting you hated, paid a small fortune for a suit you didn't feel comfortable in and put yourself in a situation you find distressing because you wanted to make me happy. This is not making *you* happy, therefore extinguishing my desire to continue with it."

"It, or me?" Will snaps. A bell of silence follows, and Hannibal's head ticks an inch.

"Will." His voice takes on a note of uncertainty. "Have I done something to upset you?"

"No! God, no."

"Very well. And you have my word that you've done nothing to upset me. So let's go home."

Will drains his glass and sets it on the windowsill. "Fine. Let's." He's not sure why he's so agitated when Hannibal has been nothing but calm and fair about it.

Not a word passes between them until they're in the car.

"Will you stay tonight?" Hannibal asks.

The drive home seems long, and he's had a couple of drinks - but he itches with the need to run. "It's up to you."

"You know you're always welcome."

Will looks out the window as the city rolls by. His knee bounces anxiously. "What is this - this thing that you do where you just let me pull away?"

"Sometimes you need it."

"But you - you're never angry. It's almost - it's almost inhuman how calm you are."

"I've worked hard for that," Hannibal tells him.

Will knows. He hates that he's being selfish.

"Your reaction suggests you want me to be angry to justify your feelings of discomfort," Hannibal continues, "try as I might, I cannot convince you of something you won't see, Will. All I can do is explain to you that I care nothing for the circumstance that worries you in any way."

"That's shrink talk," Will tells him, half squirming and half resentful. They stop at a traffic light, and Hannibal is silent again for a stretch.

"If I tell you I love you, Will, is that shrink talk? If I tell you that you occupy my every waking thought, and often my dreams as well?" He sounds almost defeated. "I'm not angry because nothing that endangered your wellbeing could bring me any joy. If you need space, or time to think, then I harbor no resentment in giving it you."

"Hannibal," Will gasps.

"I doubt it's news to you."

No, of course it's not. Will's head is still spinning. "Hannibal," he repeats weakly.

"I love you, Will," Hannibal says again, turning onto the county road that leads to his house.

Unable to speak, Will just reaches over and grasps his hand tightly. It might not keep him from running, but he needs to try.

Calm as ever, Hannibal fastens their fingers and keeps driving. He needs both hands to pull them into the driveway and park, and they sit in separate silence for a moment. Will's mind feels crammed full and too loud. He looks out the window again.

"I brought your furniture," he says quietly, "I should get it."

"It's ten in the evening, I think it can wait," Hannibal murmurs. "Unless you're leaving."

Will bites his lip. He looks at Hannibal finally. "Thank you for always giving me what I need, even when sometimes I think it's not what I need," he says softly. "I'm sorry I'm disjointed at the moment. It's nothing you've done, you have my word."

"Thank you," Hannibal echoes. Then he sighs, very softly. "You are leaving."

"I have to," Will says miserably.

"All right, Will. Are you able to drive? I can take you if-"

"I'm okay. I'm sober, I swear."

Hannibal nods, eyes searching his face. Will can't meet his eyes, not without the dam in him bursting, so instead he just takes his hands again tightly.

"I'll come back. With your furniture. I'll bring it back." It's not at all what he wants to say.

"I understand," Hannibal says softly.

"I should go."

"All right." He gets out of the Bentley at the same time Will does, circling around the other side, close to the house. "Good night, Will. Be safe."

"Good night," he echoes quietly. "I'll call you, okay?"

"A message when you've arrived in Wolf Trap would be appreciated," he murmurs.

"Okay." Will grabs his keys from the Bentley and scrunches them tightly in his hand before he works himself up to getting in the truck. Hannibal doesn't move an inch.

Will waits until he's at least a mile down the road before he pulls up to hit the steering wheel and windows in frustration, his whole body coiled like a trap. Lips pull back from clenched teeth, but no noise emerges. Then he claps his arms over his face and clutches his hair tight enough to hurt, tight enough to make his eyes sting. He stays there until the sound of his pounding pulse recedes from his ears. Then he wipes his eyes and drives home.

By the time he gets there he's exhausted and emotionally saturated, stripping out of his clothes and whistling the dogs up onto the bed so that he can fall asleep with his face pressed into fur, warmth banking his back. He stays there as long as he can, propping a door open for the dogs in the early morning.

When he can’t put it off any longer, he drags himself out of bed and pulls on the closest clothes. He brushes his teeth, washes his face, and gets in the truck. Alana's isn't far. He stops for pastries. She deserves that much.

When he knocks, she answers in her robe.

"Will. Are you okay?" He shakes his head. She steps back and lets him in. "I'll get some coffee."

He sits down in one of her living room chairs, sighing as her dog comes over for pets. "Hey Applesauce." He looks up when Alana comes back with a cafetière.

"Here you are. Wanna tell me what's up?"

"I went to the opera with Hannibal last night," he sighs.

"Oh? I'm guessing it didn't go... great?"

"I didn't make it past intermission. It was just... too much."

As usual, she registers no surprise. "Was he upset?"

"No, he said he could go any time. He was worried about me."

Now she does look vaguely surprised. "And that... upset you?"

Will laughs. "That I can't make it through an entire social event to please my *significant other*? Of course it did."

"You want to though. That has to mean something." Alana keeps her voice carefully un-therapeutic. "You're not worse, Will. You've just spent a long time avoiding stressful situations. Now you're not, but they're still stressful."

"I swear to god, if you say the words 'exposure therapy'..."

"What if I just say 'therapy'?"

Will pulls a face, but relents. "I've been meaning to look into it, Hannibal and I talked about how it... might help."

"Let me guess," she says. "You said you wanted either him or me, and dropped it when he said that wasn't appropriate."

Will bites his lip. "Yeah, pretty much." He rubs his hands over his face, a thread of frustration in his voice. "I just - I want. Him. I want us to be alone. And I know that's - insane and possessive and awful. I want him to come to the farm and stay. I want to never see anyone else except him again." He covers his mouth closes his eyes and mumbles: "and maybe you and Bev."

She sips her own coffee, expression sympathetic. Something else, too. He thinks it's worried.

"I've never seen you like this about anyone," she says softly.

"It sounds *crazy*," he sighs. "To find that kind of - nourishment - in someone's *presence*." He risks another look at her, and a soft smile has formed on her face.

"Will... it's not crazy. I mean - you made it sound a little like you want to keep him in your basement, which *is* crazy, but from what I know from Hannibal, you're not alone. Is that what scares you?"

"He told me he loves me," Will mumbles.

"I know he does," Alana replies. "It's obvious." Will fidgets until she continues. "Hannibal isn't the kind of man to tell you that if he didn't have every intention of sticking around. He knows the power words have. So do you."

"Yes," Will murmurs. "But what happens when he realizes," he tongues the edge of a canine, hating the way it sounds, "... that he made a mistake with me?"

"That would suggest that he doesn't know exactly what he's doing. How likely is that, for a man like Hannibal?"

"He - he hasn't even seen me at my worst," Will protests, "I've been trying so hard not to show him."

"Do you really think it will make a difference?" she asks softly.

"Well I couldn't love me, could you?"

"I wanted to," she tells him softly, "but I wasn't what you needed. I think Hannibal is what you need, Will."

Will can't even imagine arguing with that. He looks around and feels that awful pang of realization again. All this time he's been so afraid of being alone, he's been isolating both of them. It strikes him in a terrifying, tricksome way that perhaps if he wanted Hannibal to stay he could just ask him to.

"You look like your gears are turning," Alana murmurs.

"I suppose I'm. Trying out an alternate reality where I'm not such a mess all the time."

Alana tucks her hair behind her ear. "It doesn't have to be an alternate one, if you decide to make it that way." She sips her coffee. "Get a therapist, Will. Tell Hannibal how you feel. It will all be easier after that, I promise you."

He nods and goes back to his own coffee. "Yeah," he bites his lip. "Got any references?"

“Hannibal doesn’t?”

“I wanna see if you pick the same ones.”

"I'll make a list of names for you," she shrugs. "People I think you might have a rapport with."

"Thank you." He swills the coffee, cooling rapidly now. Even just deciding on an action feels - better. "I uh. I think I should go and talk to him."

"I think it'll make you feel better." She smiles.

"Thank you. For everything. I'm sorry I haven't been in touch sooner." He's standing, swinging on his jacket and petting distractedly at Applesauce.

"How about I bring Applesauce out for a hike soon?" she suggests.

"How about you bring Applesauce and Bev?" Will counters.

Alana's smile warms. "Sure. Invite Hannibal too."

"Maybe," Will murmurs. Hannibal in the woods is something he still feels selfish about.

Alana tilts her head. "Maybe dinner or something first."

"We'll see." He offers her a smile and a quick clasp of her hand.

She squeezes it. "I do love you, you know. Bev does too. We all consider our lives richer for having you in them."

He bites his lip. "Thanks, Alana." He ducks his head. "I - you too." She lets him go with another smile.

He hurries back to his truck. Saturday. Hannibal won't have any clients today - hopefully he'll be home. Will can wait if he has to. He'll unload the furniture, set it up nicely...suddenly he almost hopes he does have to wait.

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Hannibal's car isn't in the drive when he gets there. Distantly, Will wonders if this is breaking and entering as he gets the spare key off his set - the one Hannibal gave him when he was fitting the kitchen. *Guess this means it's serious*, Will had joked. It makes him want to laugh now. It's as serious as anything he can imagine.

He unloads the furniture onto the patio, but comes back out to the truck after that: it feels strange to haunt Hannibal's space, knowing how private he is. He tips the seat back and closes his eyes.

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Hannibal taps on the window - Will isn't sure how much later, just that his glasses are crooked, and he fell asleep in his car outside Hannibal's house like a creep. He scrambles to open the door.

Hannibal doesn't seem to think he's creepy; Hannibal's expression looks like a man who's just found something he desperately wants.

"Will," he says softly, "I just came from Wolf Trap..."

Will stares for a moment, gears ticking him into awareness. "You went to my house."

"You never messaged me, I was - I thought." He's at a loss for words for once, expression so awfully unsure that Will feels a fierce squeeze of guilt at worrying him. Slowly, he holds out an elegant hand to help Will out of his seat.

They both just look at one another for a minute, and then Will clears his throat. "I'm sorry - can we go inside?"

"Of course." Hannibal lets go of his hand, taking a step back to let him pass.

It's taking everything Will has to keep breathing. Inside, he lets Hannibal take his jacket and hang it with his own. They're in the kitchen before he finally manages to gather himself.

"Hannibal-" he takes his hands, staggered by the easiness when Hannibal lets him link their fingers, eyes soft and dark and not a little worried. Will hates it so much the words come out of him in a rush.

"I hate being away from you," he stutters, "I hate that I miss you - every day. And that I hurt you by pulling away. I didn't mean to. I didn't want to. And I don't want to do it anymore. I wasn't prepared to love you and I do, and it's - it's changing everything I know. I'm sorry."

Hannibal's lids flutter closed during it like the words are actually flowing over him. When they open again his eyes are wet. "Will," he whispers.

"I want you to live with me," Will says quickly. He squeezes Hannibal's fingers. "I know you love this house and I love this house too, but I love my house, and I love you, and I need you, and - please. Please help me."

"Will, I don't love this house," Hannibal interrupts gently. "I love the things you put in it. When I moved here... it was because I had to pick somewhere new in a hurry after my last property fell through. I have no attachment to this house but for the parts of it you have touched." He lifts his hand, cupping Will's face gently. His eyes are shining, mouth bowed. It's the most emotion Will's ever seen on his face. "I love you, Will. Everything you touch. Everything you are."

"Hannibal," he sighs, letting himself be folded against Hannibal's chest. He feels him tip his cheek against his temple; cup the back of his head.

"I would never resent you for things outside of your control, Will. I promise you."

"I want to be in control again," Will mumbles. "I asked Alana to refer me to a psychiatrist, but if you can think of anyone better then - that's fine too. We'll discuss it."

"As you wish, love."

"You make me feel... I never met anyone that I preferred being with to being by myself."

"You prefer me."

"Jealously," Will murmurs.

"Jealously." Hannibal sounds way more pleased than Will anticipated.

"Like a dog with roadkill."

That gets him a chuckle. "Yes, I see. Will - may I kiss you?"

"Yeah, god, yeah." He watches enraptured as Hannibal lowers his head. His lips are firm and warm. Will has never felt more like coming home. He threads his hands into soft hair. "I love you," he says again, quietly. "Thank you."

"Will. You're everything to me."

Another kiss, laden with mute urgency now. Hannibal's hands find his waist, clasping tight. It's like the distance Will tried to unravel between them has been wound back up. He can't stand the thought of any air between them now. Judging by Hannibal's fierce, claiming kisses, he feels the same.

"I love you," Will breathes again when they break apart.

Hannibal actually smiles now, a little damp and frayed. "And I you." He strokes his fingers over Will's cheek.

"So what," Will says softly, "do I gotta tear out your kitchen?"

"Of course not, the resale value of the house would plummet." He cups Will's neck gently. "But I want my chandelier."

Will smiles. "I don't know how many times I have to tell you, I didn't make that chandelier."

"I don't care. You had it made for me. Don't spoil my notions of romance."

"Okay; sorry." Will hides his growing grin. They both look around the kitchen. Will's eyes slide to Hannibal. "Worth all that money?"

"You remember what it looked like before," Hannibal says calmly.

"I do." Will sighs, fidgeting. "I meant from the point of view of - moving."

"Will you be there, in Wolf Trap?"

"Jesus, I hope so?"

"Then it's worth any amount of money." He smiles. "Besides, I'll get it back from selling."

Will blows out a breath. "God, Hannibal. This is real?"

"If you want it to be. Though as fair warning: I have stipulations about having a bed in the living room."

"I had a feeling."

Hannibal kisses him again. "Will. Come upstairs with me."

Will nods before his thoughts catch up to him. "Oh. I brought your patio set!"

"Will," Hannibal says firmly. "*Later*."

"I made it with my bare hands," Will protests faintly.

"I know. I adore it, nearly as much as I adore you. Will. *Please*." He nudges him. "We can have dinner on the patio. Please."

He sounds faintly desperate. Relenting, Will turns to let him herd him upstairs. "I'd call you ungrateful, but I guess I'm flattered you find me more compelling than wood."

"Much," Hannibal says shortly.

It makes Will laugh a little, the anxiety from before seeping away slowly. He tugs at Hannibal until they're climbing the steps together.

In Hannibal's bedroom, Will looks around and tries to remember the last time he was in here. He should have realized sooner that Hannibal didn't care very much about whose house he was in, because Hannibal only ever wants to be with Will. He turns to him at the thought, swallowing hard.

"No one's ever loved me like you love me."

"Good," Hannibal says, a bit more fiercely than Will thinks he meant to, "because if anyone loved you the way you deserve, then you would never have looked twice in my direction." He looks a bit startled at himself when it comes out. "That was... selfish of me. I apologize."

Will's turn to look embarrassed now. "I uh, said something similar to Alana."

"Did you?" Hannibal murmurs, reaching for him.

"Yeah. It's probably something I should talk about in therapy."

"Perhaps I should as well."

Will laughs and pulls him in gently by his collar. "You go to therapy too?"

"Bedelia is my therapist."

"Oh," Will says. "That... doesn't help me be less jealous of her."

"Because she knows about me."

"Pretty much."

Hannibal's dark eyes warm under the admittance. "I will tell you everything."

Will sighs and relaxes against him. "Me too."

He almost melts under the next kiss. It's slow and soft and entirely claiming. His fingers card into Will's hair gently.

"You're here with me," he sighs, like he's telling himself it's real.

"I'm here."

Will keeps him close by his collar. Eventually, Hannibal lowers his hands to start picking at the buttons of Will's shirt.

"I hope this is all right, I just - need this -"

"You need me?"

"So much. I thought of you all last night. All morning. Every day, Will, every day."

He can see the truth of it. It chokes him, the hugeness of the admittance. "Me too," he sighs, "even when I thought I shouldn't."

"Why is that, Will? Why is it you believe yourself undeserving of this?"

"Isn't that a therapy question, Doctor Lecter?"

"It's... unfathomable to me. I'm curious."

"You don't give your finest china to someone who's known to drop things."

"Another fitting if unflattering analogy. Do you trust me not to drop your china, Will?"

"Yes..." He's staggered to find he means it.

"And I trust you."

"Thank you," he says quietly, then he leans to kiss him again.

It's not enough to distract Hannibal from his mission of undressing them both. He's so tender when he lays Will down on the bed, Will feels like he might cry just from his own relief. Hannibal's lips are on his neck, hands covering his skin and Will exults in the care he takes.

"God," he sighs, "Hannibal, please."

"Please what, my love?"

"Just touch me - be with me."

"That's all I want."

"Convenient, really." Will smiles wryly up at Hannibal, who kisses it.

"I must agree. Tell me what you want, Will."

Everything. It's too big of a question. "Make me feel good," Will mumbles.

Hannibal closes his lips over his collarbone. "Gladly."

Will sighs as his mouth travels. It caresses every bit of his skin. When he gets lower, Will stalls a little. "Hannibal - I want to taste you too."

"You certainly can."

He nods quickly; tugs Hannibal up again to kiss him deep. Then he rolls them over.

Hannibal pauses him. "I want you to be careful of your shoulder, if you have in mind what I think you do then might I suggest a slightly more forgiving arrangement?"

Will has to laugh. "Suggest away."

He's shocked at how much he adores him - this patient, strange Doctor, who's lying him carefully on his back before he shifts to lie alongside him with his head by his hip, one gentle hand wandering. His eyes adore Will in return.

Leaning up on his good arm, Will kisses his stomach slow. He lets his lips travel over muscle and soft hair. He's so aware of Hannibal's fingers; his mouth. His hot breath on sensitive flesh. He grips gently at one of Will's cheeks as he leans to lick him slowly.

Will groans. He slides his own fingers up and around the base of Hannibal's cock. Hannibal's stomach clenches tellingly. Gathering his wits, Will tongues him into his mouth. He feels him firm up almost immediately as he sucks. The sensation has Will groaning softly at once; sucking him deeper, soft and wet. He's not sure how much of him he can fit in his mouth, but he can use his hand, too. He takes him in as far as he can, swallowing gently.

Hannibal fattens out even more as he goes. The taste floods his mouth as he starts to leak. The whirls of his tongue over Will's cock get distracted before he sucks him into his mouth in a renewed effort.

Will whimpers, wrapping fingers around his base and squeezing in rhythm. He's rewarded with several long passes of Hannibal's tongue against his cunt. He squirms into it, wishing for more. Every motion is turning eager now, both of them coiled and tangled. Hannibal braces his hip to suck him again. His own hips are quivering.

"Hannibal-" Will squeezes him gently with a hand as he pulls off, "please fuck me-"

"Will, love -"

"Please?" He can't stop mouthing at Hannibal's cock. "Please, please."

Hannibal sits up smoothly, tugging Will up into a kiss that tastes of sex. "How do you want me to fuck you?"

Will bites his lip. It's a hard call. "I - let me ride you," he groans softly.

Hannibal's eyes go bright and hot like he can't think of anything more perfect. "Gladly."

They slip into position easily. Hannibal gathers him close and Will wraps his legs around his waist.

"You look so beautiful." Will brushes his hair back from his face, then sighs as Hannibal presses back in to kiss his throat, the cradle of their hips hot and slick as they move together. It's an intense, slow ratchet of sensation. Will feels submerged in Hannibal's presence; drugged by it. He rocks down eagerly, pressing kisses over Hannibal's face.

"I love you," Hannibal says softly.

Will moans. "I - I love you too." He tips his head back for Hannibal's mouth. "Fuck - Hannibal, I need you."

"I'm here, love."

"Inside me," Will reiterates.

He feels the exhale. "Ah, yes. Of course." Hannibal shifts under him, one hand steadying his cock. "Ready?" He teases the head under Will's cock, slide of their skin easy.

"Yes, Hannibal." Clutching at his shoulders, Will takes him in with one smooth tilt of his hips, and they both shiver. Hannibal's cheek smudges against his, breath hot, hands clasping to pull him tighter. He thinks they can't possibly get any closer. Hannibal cradles him as he rocks, and Will suddenly can't think anything at all. Nothing but the sensations and the awful, perfect relief of it. The noise that breaks out of him is weak and needy. It only blends into the general rush of his blood in his ears. "God I've missed your cock."

Hannibal makes a low noise. Something unintelligible is in there - words, but maybe not English.

"Tell me," Will murmurs.

Hannibal kisses under his ear. "My body is yours."

"Oh fuck," Will breathes. The only way he can respond is with his hand on Hannibal's thigh for leverage as he fucks himself faster on his cock.

Hannibal's hands cradle him close. He kisses Will's chest and shoulders slowly. His breathing is fast, though, and he's so hard inside him. Will can't keep from telling him how good he feels; how much he wants him. It's the only truth he knows. It bubbles out of him like spring water. If he's a brook, Hannibal is a man dying of thirst. He wants to give him everything.

"Hannibal-" their liquid movements intensify. Hannibal's hand slips down to his cock. He rubs fast, tight circles. "Jesus, *yes*."

He's right on the edge, swimming in sensations, and Hannibal looks so intent. He watches Will's face for each expression.

"So close," Will promises. He kisses Hannibal deeply, and as his peak edges closer, he fucks him harder, overwhelmed by how good it feels. By the swell of love within him. He can't think of anything but loving Hannibal even as he comes hard enough to make his eyes sting.

A few long shudders, and he's rocking again, encouraging. Hannibal's hands go tight on his hips, their foreheads pressed together now. Will is besotted with the gape of his mouth. He pants and shakes his way into his own orgasm, and it feels like something binding, something true. Something precious they can hold between them.

They clutch one another for another long stretch of quiet, just letting their breaths settle, before Will finally slides wetly off Hannibal's softening cock.

After cleaning up in the bathroom, it's back to Hannibal's huge, soft bed, curled up facing one another in the balmy light of early evening. Will should go back to the dogs soon. He's entirely distracted stroking the silver fur of Hannibal's chest.

"I don't want to leave without you," he grumbles softly.

"Then I'll come with you."

He pauses, heart thumping out of time. "Really?"

"Of course. Let me just pack a bag first."

Will bites his lip. He touches Hannibal's jaw with his thumb, following the sharp line. "Marry me," he says, before he can stop himself.

Hannibal goes utterly still, eyes sharpening. A horrible terror goes through Will until he replies.

"Pick a day," he replies, accent thick.

That's dangerous. "Could be tomorrow for me."

"It's Sunday, and city hall is closed. The day after?" The sharpness in his eyes, it transpires, are tears. Will reaches out and touches his cheek gently, soothing with fingers in his hair.

"Monday, okay."

They both smile mutely for a moment. Will feels himself starting to shake, and then he's welling up too, unable to stifle all the raw emotion in him.

"Do you mean it-?"

"*Yes*," Hannibal whispers. "More than anything."

Wiping his eyes despite them still determinedly running, Will crawls into his arms and turns his face into Hannibal's chest. Then and only then he lets himself relax. Hannibal smooths his hands through his hair, and Will hears him sniffing too.

"I had no idea you wanted…" Will trails off.

"I say this with all the love in the world, Will, but I don't believe that for a second."

Will sighs, smiling wryly. "You're one of the only people who'd have called me on that."

"You read me well, you have from the off. I think it's one of the reasons you held me at arms' length initially."

It's true. "I'm easily influenced by other people's feelings," Will explains with a soft shrug, "I had to make sure what I was feeling was... mine."

"It seems you've decided it is," Hannibal murmurs.

"Indisputably mine," Will promises.

Hannibal kisses him again. "And you're mine."

Will looks up at him. "Yeah," he whispers, "I am." He kisses under Hannibal's chin. "Pack that bag now, I want to go home."

"Me too," Hannibal whispers, and leans in to kiss him.

‘Now’ turns into after several minutes of soft, intent kissing, but eventually Hannibal is packed and following Will's truck in his car. Will doesn't let himself use the time to second guess himself, because he's certain for once. He does, however, text Alana at a traffic light.

>>So that went well.<<

He doesn't get her reply until several minutes later.

<<Proud of you.>>

He's not sure she'll be proud of him when she finds out just how well it went. He can feel the phrase "rushing into things" waiting in the wings. He wonders what Bev will say. He thinks

she'll be happy.

He hopes so. She's generally more cavalier than Alana. Maybe she can talk her round.

His fretting continues well into the house when he precedes Hannibal by a few minutes. He lets the dogs out, then starts lighting a fire and heating water for coffee. He only steps to the door when he hears dogs greeting Hannibal.

"Yes," Hannibal is saying to them patiently, adrift amongst a sea of wagging tails, "I will pet each of you eventually, I may need a minute."

Will bites his lip against a smile. "A minute won't be enough, Doctor."

Hannibal looks up. "I defer to your expertise."

"I think this is the only area that it need be applied."

"Probably not." Hannibal half-smiles and comes to him.

Will steps into the opening bracket of his arms without hesitation. "You're here."

"I am."

"I'll do whatever you want to the house," Will mumbles, leaning on him.

"I know you will." Hannibal kisses him softly. "And it will be beautiful."

"New kitchen?" The words buzz between their lips.

Hannibal laughs, kissing him again. "Yes. But *our* design this time."

"Are you bringing your operating table?"

"Am I allowed?"

"Yeah," Will laughs.

"OR table, chandelier. Patio furniture?" Hannibal's clearly teasing now.

"You better bring that patio furniture."

Will lets himself be tugged inside after that. They make coffee and take it in turns to shower. Will takes the dogs while Hannibal is in the bathroom, and when he returns he's cooking. Their routine now, he realizes. Watching Hannibal move around his kitchen, graceful as if he did design the space himself, is soothing. Will sits down with more coffee, watching him and stroking Harley and Zoe. Buster sits at attention by the corner of the counter, just far enough out of the way to not be stepped on. Occasionally - and possibly when he thinks Will isn't looking - Hannibal throws him a scrap.

Will pretends vigorously not to notice. It's probably his favorite thing he's ever seen.

"If we knock out that back wall and take over the sun porch we can make the kitchen much bigger," he says after a while.

"But then we won't have a sun porch," Hannibal points out.

"I'll build a new one."

"A patio. For the furniture." Hannibal is smiling.

Will rolls his eyes, but it's fond. "Whatever you want." His chest is warm with the feelings Hannibal is instilling. Fondness, of course. A little possessiveness as always. Love. He looks around. Everything looks... as it should be. His eyes go back to Hannibal. "What's for dinner?"

"Trout with a citrus and basil sauce," Hannibal replies. "I found the filets in your fridge, I hope you don't mind."

"Not at all. Sounds good." He smiles up at Hannibal from his seat at the table. "Want some company while you finish?"

"You may keep an eye on the potatoes," Hannibal allows.

"I can do that," Will replies.

He manages it. Even if he'd rather keep an eye on Hannibal.

"I was thinking we could ask Alana to witness, but I'm not sure she'd agree," Hannibal says eventually.

Will makes a face. She's not going to like this. "Someone at the courthouse can do it."

"I would prefer it be someone we know. I think she'll be pleased when she's had time to... consider it."

"Might not be tomorrow, then."

"Monday," Hannibal points out.

"Might not be Monday either."

"It will be." He sounds very confident.

Really, who is Will to argue. He meets Hannibal's gaze, and he's smiling.

"I suppose we ought to have her over for dinner tomorrow, then," Will grumbles.

"I have already sent her an invitation."

"At home already, are you Hannibal?"

"Well, I assumed you wouldn't want me to be spending too much time at my old house once we're married."

There's a beat of silence, and then Will relents. "Can we have your bed?"

Hannibal smiles serenely. "You can have anything you want, love."

God, that could go long. "Okay," his lips twitch just a bit.

Hannibal brings his chopping board over and, after adding its contents to the pot Will is stirring, kisses him soundly. "Choose wisely."

Will wets his lower lip and then sighs to himself. He'd laugh at himself if he could. "I already did."

Hannibal cups his cheek with a gentle hand. "As did I."

FIN.

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